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AS TO BEING REFORMED

As To Being Reformed

BY

R. B. KUIPER, A.M., B.D.

*Pastor of the
Lagrange Avenue Christian Reformed Church
Grand Rapids, Michigan*

"Faith of our fathers, living still
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword,
O, how our hearts beat high with joy,
Whene'er we hear that glorious word:
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death".

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TO MY WIFE ON THE FIFTEENTH
ANNIVERSARY OF OUR WEDDING,
AND TO MARIETTA AND KLAUDIUS,
WHO, THEIR PARENTS PRAY, MAY
GROW UP TO BE HUMBLE AND, AT
ONCE, STURDY CALVINISTS

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PREFACE

THE FOLLOWING PAGES are in effect an appeal to the members of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church to continue soundly Reformed or to become more so.

The idea of making this appeal was conceived during my stay in the Reformed Church in America from the autumn of 1923 to the autumn of 1925.

That brief period was rich in experiences, many of which were pleasant and some unpleasant, while all of them, I believe, were beneficial to me.

I made several new acquaintances and even friends. My eyes were opened to many Christian virtues in a denomination against which, I admit, I had been somewhat prejudiced. I think I grew more tolerant. My missionary zeal could hardly help being kindled.

But I was especially deeply impressed by two things: *THE IMMINENT PERIL IN WHICH WE AMERICAN CALVINISTS ARE OF LOSING OUR PRECIOUS REFORMED HERITAGE, AND THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF OUR HOLDING IT FAST.* Hence this appeal.

I am well aware that some members of the Christian Reformed Church thought less of me

for leaving the denomination. In fact I was surprised at the many urgent invitations to return that were extended me. And I am cognizant of the fact that I fell in the estimation of several members of the Reformed Church when I did return to my former connections.

But these things have never troubled me so very much. In fact, when first I planned to write this book, I intended to pass them by in silence. For such steps, I firmly hold, one is responsible to God rather than to men. "To one's own Master one standeth or falleth". And is there not much wisdom in the advice of Elbert Hubbard, pagan though he was: "Never explain; your friends don't need it, and your enemies won't believe you anyhow"?

Later on, however, it appeared to me that I owed it to my friends and to myself to make a few remarks on the subject. Like most smart sayings, the one just quoted is but partly right. Misunderstanding is the root of much evil. Should I not try to remove it in this case? So let me say just a little here, just a little more in the first chapter, and then drop the matter.

Almost superfluous to say, it is not a sin in itself to leave one evangelical denomination for another. One may sin in doing it, and one may not. Much depends on WHY the step is taken. Just think of the men and women who received their early training in the Christian Reformed Church and are now missionaries for the Reformed.

When I left the Christian Reformed Church, I was convinced that, in view of certain conditions which then prevailed in that denomination, I could do more for the Kingdom in the Reformed Church in America.

That the Reformed Church is historically the American church for Calvinists of Dutch extraction also had some weight with me.

Had I been fully aware of the Reformed Church's doctrinal laxity, I would not have made the change.

Had the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 taken a less firm stand in the matter of common grace, I would not have been altogether so ready to return.

But the subject of this book is quite another and one of incomparably greater importance. It is CALVINISM, primarily in its theological aspect.

It goes altogether without saying that I did not plan to give anything like an exhaustive treatment of a single one of the subjects which head the following chapters. The one thing that I proposed to do was to call the attention of our people in plain language to a few things in connection with these subjects which, I believe, they need to be told in order to retain or regain their hold on the Reformed faith.

As my readers I have in mind members of the two churches already named. May I not assume on their part an elementary knowledge of Reformed doctrines and principles?

I have sought to be constructive. It has been my constant striving to build up, not to break down. And whatever criticism the following pages contain is offered in a spirit of unstinted Christian love.

It will be noted that Scriptural quotations abound. There is a reason. Calvinism is, of course, thoroughly Biblical. Only in case texts are adduced as direct proofs of certain doctrines, is the exact reference given.

I have written neither to please nor to offend. Christ has made me a free man. And I love all men, especially those "who are of the household of faith".

May it prove that I have contributed a little to the good of men and, above all else, to God's glorification!

R. B. K.

June 18, 1926

My Experience in the
Reformed Church in America

CHAPTER I.

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

IN THE SPRING of 1923 the Consistory of the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo requested me to give a Sunday to this church, which was then without a minister of its own. I declined the invitation. When the request was repeated in the summer, I promised to come on one of my vacation Sundays. And so on the second Sunday of August I preached for Second Kalamazoo.

My morning sermon was on Pilate's question, addressed to the Savior: "What is Truth?" Toward the end of my discourse I especially stressed the facts: (1) that God is Truth; (2) that Christ is Truth; (3) that the Bible is Truth; (4) that the Reformed interpretation of the Bible, as embodied in the Reformed Church Standards, is Truth. I had delivered the same sermon to several other congregations, but this time I enjoyed preaching it more than ever. The reason was not in me but in the audience. It was wonderfully responsive. The attention was truly rapt.

It was largely on the strength of its impression of this sermon that the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo extended to me a unanimous call on Sep-

tember 6, 1923. If I were to say that the call came as a complete surprise, I would be telling a lie. Though not a word of conversation or correspondence relative to a call had passed between any member of the church, including the Consistory, and me, yet I knew very well how the sermon referred to had taken. Besides, it was quite generally known that I was dissatisfied with certain conditions in my own denomination.

To decline this call would, of course, have been to follow the path of least resistance. Full well did I realize that acceptance would cost me popularity and honors. Worse than that, I saw it coming that heretofore warm friends would at least temporarily give me the cold shoulder. It was perfectly evident that, if I left the Christian Reformed Church, I was going to be misunderstood and even slandered. I knew that I would be stamped a renegade, a turn-coat, an apostate. Moreover, if I had "conferred with flesh and blood", I would not have thought seriously of exchanging a very flourishing charge for one that was considerably run down. But the conviction kept growing on me that God wanted me to go. After an intense struggle I decided that I could not do otherwise. Nobody knows what inward pain I suffered when I was compelled to sever the tie that had for six years united me to the Sherman Street Church, which to the present day I fondly regard as one of the best of all Christian Reformed churches. The

reader will kindly bear with me if this sentiment seems prejudicial.

For a minister to give to men a full account of the motives which actuated him in accepting or declining a call, has always seemed to me to be the height of folly. He owes an account only to his divine Sender. But I do want to tell of one consideration that had much weight with me in the case in hand. When I preached to the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo on "What is Truth?" I thought to notice on the part of the audience a decided hunger and thirst for the Truth of God. While I had the call under consideration, I was assured by the Consistory, without my having mentioned the matter, that precisely this was the reason why I had been called. I felt it my sacred duty with the aid of God's grace to help satisfy this hunger and quench this thirst.

And now I must laud the Second Reformed Church. Soon after my arrival in its midst I discovered that with few exceptions its members were sadly uninformed about Christian doctrine in general and Reformed doctrine in particular. So I began to preach doctrine upon doctrine. And it took. The response was even enthusiastic. Sunday audiences doubled, to say the least. Prejudice against catechismal preaching broke down. The catechism classes, which had been nigh unto death, revived. A class for advanced Bible study, which was organized in order to get the adult members to studying, flourished. The Second

Reformed Church of Kalamazoo had proved its mettle.

The church about which I am writing is far from perfect. It has several spots and not a few wrinkles. Exactly the same thing may truthfully be said of any other church. Perhaps that is an important reason why I felt as well at home at Second Kalamazoo as I did. Somehow I am much more at ease in the company of rather great sinners than of perfectionists. Nor I am ashamed to tell about this. May I not appeal to him who preferred the company of publicans and sinners to that of Pharisees?

For me to publish a long list of the faults which cleave to the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo would be a simple matter. But it would be as ignoble as if a member of this church were to prepare for print a catalogue of my faults.

Second Kalamazoo has a reputation for worldliness. Several of its members are reported to have wasted valuable time at card-playing and to have frequented theatres. Some of the young people are said to dance occasionally. I know this to be sadly true. And so I felt it my duty to preach very frequently and very fervently against worldliness, and to remind God's people that they are a peculiar people, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, who ought to take pride in differing from the world. Just as I found it necessary to preach when I was still serving Christian Reformed churches.

But the bulk of the membership is down on all

forms of distinctly worldly amusements. And some who were slipping have thanked me for warning them. Nor can I escape the impression that much of the criticism that has been leveled against this church on the score of worldliness was prompted by jealousy of its financial prosperity and such narrow-mindedness as would not have permitted its proud possessor to enter a theatre if the silver-tongued and golden-hearted William Jennings Bryan were booked to deliver his lecture on *The Prince of Peace*.

Kalamazoo Second has been called a hotbed of Masonry. It has even been asserted that the Consistory is full of Masons. When I left this church not a single Mason held office. The men in the church who now are or once were connected with the Masonic organization number perhaps a baker's dozen. Several have of late severed their connection with the lodge. I do not know of one active Mason in the church. Those who are Masons are faithful attendants at Sunday services; not one of them, so far as I can see, makes the lodge his church. I have reason to believe that my criticism of the lodge was not altogether futile.

It is an exceedingly pleasant task for me to catalogue a few of the many virtues of the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo. They follow.

The people of this church are friendly to the point of cordiality. Visitors and newcomers are made to feel at home, much as in the Lagrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

On several occasions the members of this church have manifested the warmest kind of sympathy and almost astounding generosity toward fellow-members in distress. I have here witnessed touching exemplifications of the truth that, when one member suffers, the other members suffer with it, and of the rule that Jesus' disciples should bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

There is some culture in this church, which has contributed toward making my work in its midst pleasant.

I have not had another church where as much was said and done to encourage me in my work. Chronic kickers, of which there seem to be some in every congregation, are exceptionally few here.

As was already indicated, I discovered in this church not merely appreciation of, but a decided hunger for, doctrinal preaching.

The most severe practical preaching was, to my knowledge, never resented by the congregation, and usually applauded.

Genuine piety, a walking with God, intimate communion with the Savior, are characteristic of a considerable part of the membership of this church.

With the possible exception of the Overisel Christian Reformed Church, my lot has never been cast among Christians who conversed so freely, yet so tenderly, on spiritual matters. In this connection let me remark that I shall long remember the many sweet hours spent at family-visitation in Kalamazoo.

I found more of the assurance of faith in the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo than I was accustomed to finding in Christian Reformed churches. The unhealthy view that doubting is a virtue has but very few adherents here.

That the Christian may not be satisfied with receiving blessings but ought also to dispense blessings, is pretty well understood by the bulk of the members. Hence there is considerable missionary activity here. For instance, the Second Church is responsible for the financial support of two missionaries in foreign fields.

Lest I seem to be praising out of due measure, perhaps I had better halt here.

May I not record that on November 2, 1925, a full month after my return to the Christian Reformed Church, my wife and I had the unique pleasure of entertaining the Consistory members of the Second Reformed Church with their "better halves"? The evening was spent in eating and drinking, pleasant chat and the singing of spiritual songs.

Just one more thing I want to say. *My reasons for leaving the Reformed Church in America were not primarily congregational.*

I long had misgivings about the doctrinal soundness of the Reformed Church in America. But, to be perfectly honest, I must admit that they were aroused by hearsay. And I have learned to discount hearsay liberally.

Nevertheless, when I was considering the call from

the Second Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, I thought myself in duty bound to heed this matter. I instituted what I thought was a careful and sufficiently thorough investigation. Several Reformed Church leaders, whose doctrinal soundness I felt sure was far beyond suspicion, and for whose orthodoxy I even now have the highest regard, though I admit that I am puzzled, assured me that manifest departures from the Reformed Church Standards were not tolerated in the Reformed Church in America, not in the eastern section either.

I received the call from Kalamazoo a couple of months after the adjournment of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. That Synod had elected Dr. Edward S. Worcester to the chair of Systematic Theology at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary. I knew that his election had entailed somewhat of a struggle because a number of the delegates to the Synod were in doubt as to his doctrinal position. So I sought first-hand information on the subject. I was informed that, though at first there had been a question in the minds of several delegates concerning Dr. Worcester's soundness, when the final ballot was cast doubts had vanished and stalwart conservatives had rallied to his support.

About six months after accepting Kalamazoo's call—to be exact, on May 28, 1924—I came into possession of a document purporting to be a Memorandum prepared for the Board of Superintendents

of the New Brunswick Seminary by Dr. Worcester, pastor of the Congregational Church of Bellows Falls, Vermont, touching his views of the Reformed Church Standards. This memorandum was in the hands of said board when it nominated Dr. Worcester for the chair of Systematic Theology on May 17, 1923. So great was my surprise on reading it that I doubted its authenticity. It is anything but Reformed. I am exceedingly sorry to say that my doubts were soon dispelled. The authenticity of this memorandum appears to be beyond question.

Later on I received a copy of a printed summary of the chief contents of the memorandum. It was prepared and sent to many members of the General Synod of 1923 by four members of the Board of Superintendents of the New Brunswick Seminary who objected to the nomination of Dr. Worcester. They are the Reverends G. H. Hospers, H. P. Schuurmans, J. E. Bennink, and J. F. Heemstra. This summary is consonant with the memorandum itself.

While it is not for me to publish this remarkable document, I do owe it to myself to say something about it. For it had more to do with my return to the Christian Reformed fold than any other one thing. If this step of mine needs justification, and it would seem to require some, here it is.

I have the summary before me now.

(1) Dr. Worcester seems not to understand Reformed theology. Commenting, for instance, on the teaching that we, "being in the loins of Adam,"

shared the guilty responsibility of his sin, he supposes that Reformed doctrine also holds us responsible for all the sins of all the intervening ancestors in whose loins we were. What faithful catechumen in a Reformed church does not know better? Again he says that he dislikes the idea of endowing Adam with entire freedom and responsibility, and denying it, even in an impaired degree, to his successors. As if our Reformed Standards do in any way deny or impair the responsibility of Adam's descendants!

(2) Dr. Worcester would modify several Reformed doctrines. For Articles 6 to 11 of the first chapter of the Canons of Dordt, dealing with the doctrine of predestination, he would substitute a brief and simple reference to:

- a) "the clarity and steadfastness of God's purposes,"
- b) "their righteous and gracious motives,"
- c) "the inclusion in his sovereign will of the gift to men, as part of the likeness to himself, in which he created them, of such free will that they may choose whether to act in loyal accord with his purposes or no—which is not at all necessarily such an abrogation of his sovereignty as to imply that his purposes can and will in the long run be defeated,"
- d) "the sure reliance which the believer may place in the said righteous, gracious, and steadfast purposes, and in their individual expression to him as a call to sonship and service."

I ask: what seventeenth century Arminian would not gladly have subscribed to this statement?

Worcester would also moderate the wording or interpretation of such statements as that the natural man is "*wholly* incapable of doing any good"—Heidelberg Catechism, Question 8—; and that the fact that some obey the Gospel call and are converted is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, but "*wholly* to God."—Canons, III, Article 10.

(3) Dr. Worcester boldly rejects certain teachings of the Reformed churches. He finds no Scriptural warrant for the opinion that all men are descended from Adam. The doctrine of original sin he calls "a bit of the fanciful and allegorizing theology of the Rabbinic period of Judaism and similar schools in Christianity, which is worse than meaningless today."

(4) Dr. Worcester appears to be in doubt about some fundamental teachings of the Christian religion. When it is said in Article 5 of the Belgic Confession that we believe, without any doubt, "all things" contained in the Bible, he wonders whether the reference is to the inerrancy of Scripture, or only to the things "necessary to salvation," and adds that he regards the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture as very academic, seeing that it is confined to the original manuscripts. He states that he does not willingly accept the Athanasian Creed, as does the Belgic Confession in Article 9. In justice to

Dr. Worcester it must be said that this does not necessarily involve a rejection on his part of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps a passage in his inaugural address, delivered on May 22, 1924, may be taken as a commentary on this statement of the memorandum. Then he objects not so much to the doctrine set forth in the Athanasian Creed as to the "damnatory clauses" in which it is framed. And finally I must add that Dr. Worcester holds that the statement contained in Question 12 of the Catechism, that "God will have his justice satisfied," has no meaning to a "modern."

Attention might be called to several other objectionable statements in Dr. Worcester's memorandum. But let the above suffice. I am unspeakably sorry that I had to say so much. As it is, I will likely be called a tell-tale. But that slur I cast very far from me.

A brief of the contents of the memorandum was broadcasted to many of the delegates to the Synod of 1923 before this body convened. Today the memorandum is a matter of common knowledge among the ministers of the Reformed Church in America. With little trouble any member of that denomination should be able to secure a copy of this document. And surely the members of a church who offer for their schools of theology and are expected to pray for them, whose these schools are, and whose future spiritual leaders are molded in them, should know the theology of their professors. Then too, it might

seem that I am trying to sow seeds of discord in the Reformed field. Nothing is farther removed from my mind. I wish the Reformed Church in America peace and prosperity, and both in rich abundance.

Before going on, I want to doff my hat to Dr. Edward S. Worcester. His theology I despise. I highly respect his person. He is a real man. He was a candidate for one of the highest honors at the disposal of a distinguished denomination. In order to receive this honor he would have to subscribe to the creeds of that denomination. At the risk of losing the proffered honor he stated his objections frankly. Would that all theologians were as honest!

I am puzzled to know why the Board of Superintendents of the Seminary nominated Dr. Worcester for the chair of Systematic Theology, and even more to understand how the Synod, cognizant as it was of the content of his memorandum, could elect him. To be sure, several ballots were cast before the three-fourths vote required by Section 32 of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America was attained. But the final ballot was practically unanimous. I shall mention only those answers to the question just raised which seem to me at once most plausible and most charitable. Dr. Worcester appears to be a man of remarkably pleasing personality, and it was felt that just such a man was needed to attract students to the New Brunswick Seminary. Then too, in the course of the election another statement of Dr. Worcester was presented to Synod by

the Professors Beardsley, Raven, and Demarest, which convinced many doubters that after all he was sound in the fundamentals.

But not one of the several delegates to the Synod of 1923 whom I have interviewed about the matter, has dared to answer in the affirmative my question whether Dr. Worcester retracted the views expressed in his memorandum. Evidently he did not. And so I am still in a desperate quandary to understand how a Reformed Synod could elect him to a professorate in one of its seminaries. Even if he had retracted, it should still have been entirely out of the question to elect to the chair of Systematic Theology in a Reformed school a man who recently held the views expressed in the memorandum.

In conclusion let me say that *the case of Dr. Worcester convinced me that I could not possibly feel at home in the Reformed Church in America.*

Is the Reformed Church in America
Reformed?

CHAPTER II.

IS THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA REFORMED?

IT IS NOT my aim to answer the question written over this chapter either affirmatively or negatively. Rather do I propose to submit some evidence which he who seeks to answer it will have to consider. It goes without saying that I cannot present all the evidence that is. May I not confine myself to certain facts that have of late struck me rather forcibly?

It is a matter of common knowledge that the Reformed Church in America has virtually the same Doctrinal Standards as the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church in America. They are the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. When I say *virtually*, the reference is to the fact that the Reformed Church has seen fit to drop the "Rejection of Errors" at the conclusion of each of the five Canons. To my knowledge, this omission has never been satisfactorily explained. In view of the extreme prevalence of Arminianism in America, it seems to me to be very unwise. Yet I would not at all press this point. The positive statements of doctrine in the Canons cover the ground so well that it is hardly conceivable that one could conscientiously

subscribe to them and at the same time harbor the errors which occasioned their preparation.

At the same time, few will be so naive as to suppose that a church with Reformed creeds cannot possibly be anything but Reformed. It is no secret that the creeds of some denominations are to many members little more than a dead letter. That might conceivably be the case in the Reformed Church in America.

As a matter of fact, a large part of the membership of the Reformed Church takes its creeds very seriously. There are many Consistories which brook no departure from the Confessions on the part of their ministers. I could name several ministers, not all of them in the western section of the church either, who not only subscribe to the Standards wholeheartedly, but also preach their contents valiantly.

It is my impression that the Western Theological Seminary at Holland, Mich., stands with both its feet squarely on the solid ground of the Reformed Church Standards. I gather this from sermons and addresses by the professors as well as from the examinations of graduates of this institution by Classes. I have had the privilege and, I may add, the pleasure of taking an active part in four such examinations. The men examined measured well up to the average candidate in the Christian Reformed Church in point of Reformed convictions.

To my mind it would require a heresy-hunter to discover departures from the Reformed Confessions

in the many articles prepared for *The Leader* in the course of several years by its very able editor, Dr. J. E. Kuizenga. I dare say this quite confidently, though I have not read every single one of them.

A minister in the Reformed Church in America who received the greater part of his education at Reformed institutions in the Netherlands, told me recently that, while in some respects he would rather serve in the Christian Reformed Church, he preferred the Reformed because of its church polity. It was not at all difficult for me to understand his position. If the special stress which such eminent Dutch authorities as Dr. F. L. Rutgers and Dr. H. H. Kuyper have in recent decades been placing on the autonomy of the local church be specifically Reformed, then in this one respect at least the Reformed Church in America is ahead of the Christian Reformed. For instance, the Synods of the Reformed Church never *assess* the local churches so much per family for the financial support of the denomination's educational institutions. Nor would it occur to a Reformed Synod to lay down anything like a binding rule regarding choir singing. Christian Reformed Synods have been known to do such things.

But I return to the matter of doctrine, which interests me more than points of polity and also strikes me as being more important. And now to my keen regret I shall have to come to things less favorable.

Without again enlarging on the case of Dr. Wor-

cester, I would repeat the question: How on earth was it possible for the Synod of a church which calls itself Reformed to elect a man with such theological views to the chair of Systematic Theology at one of its seminaries?

The specifically Reformed doctrine of predestination, which John Calvin called "*cor ecclesiae*," "the heart of the church," is, to put it mildly, largely neglected in the Reformed Church in America. On several occasions I have preached it to Reformed congregations. In every case there were many who expressed surprise at the doctrine and a few who dissented. On one such occasion a man who had been elder for years, said to me: "You almost convinced me." I happen to know an instance of a person's leaving a Christian Reformed church because he could no longer believe predestination, and then being received with open arms by a neighboring Reformed Consistory.

Another specifically Reformed doctrine which is not receiving anything like due emphasis in the Reformed Church is that of the covenant of grace. In some churches children of members in full communion remain unbaptized for years. The erroneous view prevails very generally that those who were baptized in infancy do not really become church-members until they make profession of faith. Horace Bushnell was, of course, a heretic on several points; yet many a member of the Reformed Church might read to advantage his *Christian Nurture*, in which he

draws attention away from revivals to the training of children in Christian homes as the law of growth in the church. The Reformed teaching of the presupposed regeneration of covenant children would, I am sure, find little favor with a large part of the membership of this denomination. One reason, I take it, why the Reformed Church makes more of revivals than does the Christian Reformed Church, is that it makes less of the covenant doctrine. And it seems reasonable to suppose that it is partly for the same reason that the members of the Reformed Church generally do not feel as keenly as they should the need of Christian schools for their children.

There are Reformed churches which do not hesitate to receive into their fellowship such Christians as have little or no knowledge of Reformed doctrines, to say nothing of positive Reformed convictions. In an address on *The Local Church Functioning Denominationally*, delivered before the Men's Midwinter Conference at the Marble Collegiate Church on February 4, 1924, the Reverend Deane Edwards, of the Bronxville, N. Y., Reformed Church, said: "The important thing is not the name but the thing that it names. This is the very fact that enables us in Bronxville to gather into our local church Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and others, and to make them working 'Dutchmen'! They realize that it is largely a matter of name; and they are willing to take off the twelve letters of 'Presbyterian' or the nine letters of 'Metho-

dist,' or whatever it may be, and substitute the eight letters of 'Reformed' because they appreciate that in so doing they are not changing the *thing*. They say, 'What's in a name?' and they take hold of the work of our Church because they believe it to be that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

It strikes me as being very significant that the address containing this statement was approvingly broadcasted through the denomination by the Reformed Church Progress Council.

Ministers who can hardly be said to be Reformed are frequently welcomed into Reformed Church pulpits. The following clipping from *The Christian Intelligencer* of July 2, 1924, will serve as evidence:

"Summer Preachers at Marble Collegiate Church. —A list of notable preachers is to be heard during the vacation season at the Marble Collegiate Church, Fifth Avenue and 29th Street, New York City. Sunday, July 6 and Sunday, July 13, Rev. Jason Noble Pierce, D. D., President Coolidge's pastor, will preach both morning and evening. July 20, Rev. Ralph W. Sockman, D. D., Madison Avenue M. E. Church, New York City; July 27, Rev. J. W. Henderson, D. D., associate pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, Brooklyn, N. Y.; August 3 and 10, Rev. David DeForest Burrell, D. D., pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Williamsport, Pa.; August 17 and 24, Rev. Charles D. Skinner, D. D., pastor of Central Park M. E. Church, Buffalo, N. Y.; August 31, Rev. William I. Chamberlain, D. D., Secretary of

the Board of Foreign Missions; September 7, 14, 21 and 28, Rev. Charles L. Goodell, D. D., General Secretary of the Commission on Evangelism, Federal Council of Churches."

Exceedingly significant is the exchange of opinions among Reformed ministers in several issues of *The Christian Intelligencer* on the question whether young men, on entering the ministry, should still be asked to sign the Formula, in which agreement with the Church Standards is expressed.

The question was first raised by the Reverend E. C. Vanderlaan in the issue of November 26, 1924. Among other things he says: "Can anyone claim that the vast majority of our ministers are convinced of the five points of Calvinism? When an occasional Methodist or Baptist enters our ministry, is it likely that he comes because of a profound change of conviction about predestination, or because he has come to the conclusion that infants ought to be baptised? Is it not rather usually with the conviction that these things do not matter? It has come about that the things in which our fathers meant us to differ from other denominations have sunk almost out of sight, and that one can only say that our ministers are orthodox, in a large and general way, on the great doctrines common to all orthodox churches."

In succeeding issues several ministers of the Reformed Church expressed their opinions on this matter. Some strongly favored continued use of the Formula, while others frankly stated that there ought

to be substituted for it a simple formula emphasizing "the Gospel of the Grace of God in Jesus Christ." And nobody called into question the truthfulness of Mr. Vanderlaan's statements concerning the actual attitude of many Reformed Church ministers toward the Standards.

It appears, then, that in the matter of Reformed theology the Reformed Church in America is peculiarly constituted. I am reminded of the feet of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image: part iron, part clay.

However, perfect fairness requires that I append a note here. While I would not for a moment attempt to justify the laxity of the Reformed Church regarding specifically Reformed doctrines, I will say that it is very easily explained historically. The Reformed Church has been called "the oldest Protestant denomination in America." It is almost three hundred years old now. Consequently a large part of it is thoroughly American. Now surely American and Reformed are not antonyms. Yet it is not strange that continuous close contact with other American denominations, most of them not at all Reformed, has dulled the Reformed Church's sense of Calvinism. Again, centuries of intermarriage of its members with those of other churches have brought into the Reformed Church large numbers of men and women without Reformed convictions. And what is perhaps most significant in this connection, the Reformed Church has long been very active

in missions at home as well as abroad. That is its glory. But missionaries do not, as a rule, greatly stress the five points of Calvinism. Is it strange then that it has received many into its communion who indeed confess the name of Christ, but perhaps have never heard of Calvin or Dordt?

And lest we of the Christian Reformed Church exalt ourselves, let us remember the apostolic injunction: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!" What will have become of us in another two hundred years? "Hold fast that which thou hast!"

Doctrinal Controversy
in the Christian Reformed Church

CHAPTER III.

DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSY IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

“**W**HAT ails the Christian Reformed Church anyhow?” That question has of late been asked hundreds of times by members of the Christian Reformed Church as well as by outsiders. And it was usually doctrinal controversy in the church that occasioned the question.

It cannot be denied that the Christian Reformed Church has in recent years had what would seem to be much more than its proper share of doctrinal debate. To pass over minor conflicts in silence, inside a single decade a minister was deposed for denying the unity of the church of the old and the new dispensations and the Kingship of Christ over the church; a professor of theology was deposed when he refused to give an account of himself before Synod though he was charged with heresy on the basis of certain students' notes which detracted from the divine authority of Holy Writ; several ministers were deposed because they categorically denied the Reformed doctrine of common grace; and a minister was deposed for giving too liberal an interpretation of Lord's Day 38 of the

Heidelberg Catechism, which explains the Sabbath commandment. That surely is some record. It would be remarkable for a much larger denomination. And as given it is not even complete.

Consequently outsiders generally despise the Christian Reformed Church; many of its own members are blushing for shame; occasionally even a minister threatens to leave "if this thing does not stop very soon."

The readers hardly expect me to rehash the doctrinal material that has been presented to the Christian Reformed people of recent years in books, brochures, and Synodical Acta. Not a few of them, I fear, are fed up on it. I doubt too whether I could add much that is new. And so I shall discuss my subject largely from a formal viewpoint.

I wish to go on record as regarding this doctrinal controversy as a sign of health. No, I do not deny that it has a dark side; of that I am well aware. But there is also a very bright side to it. And just now I want to take pains to show up this bright side because it has been overlooked too much altogether.

The Christian Reformed Church still takes doctrine seriously. It has not been blinded by the popular fallacy of the day which has deceived scores of denominations, thousands of preachers, and millions of church-members, that Christianity is not a doctrine, but a life. Was ever antithesis more false pawned off? Christianity stands or falls with certain doctrines. It is not merely a system of moral-

ity; it is in the very first place the religion of truth. The Christian church is pillar and ground of the truth.

Does not history teach us that especially by doctrinal debate the cause of truth is wont to be advanced? In the furnace of controversy the dirty dross of falsehood has time and again been separated from the precious gold of truth. The Spirit of truth has been pleased many a time and oft to lead the church progressively in the truth through the clash of opinions. Almost all the great truths of Christendom were crystallized by conflict. That leads me to believe that ere long the Christian Reformed Church may well prove to be one of the most truly progressive churches of the land.

While the Christian Reformed Church was torn by conflict, many other churches seemed to be enjoying enviable peace. But let us not be deceived by the appearance of things. There is a peace which is no peace. Peace obtained at the expense of truth is unworthy of its name. There are churches which ascribe their apparent peace to doctrinal tolerance, while as a matter of fact they are guilty of doctrinal indifference, the wages of which are death. Cemeteries too are peaceful places. Some months ago, when I was considering a call from a Christian Reformed Church, a friend said: "You don't want to go back there; they're always fighting." I replied: "There are churches which badly need a good fight."

Let no member of the Christian Reformed Church

be ashamed of his membership in a denomination that regards purity of doctrine worth fighting for. It is reason for just pride.

At the same time, it must be admitted that the manner in which recent doctrinal controversies were carried on in the Christian Reformed Church was not altogether beyond reproach. The spirit of the debate was frequently quite reprehensible. That part of the story is sad.

It seems to me that we have sinned against two laws especially: that of justice or fairness, and that of charity or love. Without making any attempt to cite all possible instances, let me illustrate.

A committee of seven was asked to investigate the teachings of Dr. Janssen. The Curatorium, which appointed this committee, apparently wanted to be fair. It selected three men who were known to favor Janssen more or less, three who were known as his opponents, and one neutral. So far so good. But how it blundered when it placed two men on the committee whose own doctrinal soundness was under suspicion! Manifestly that should never have been done. Men who flatly denied the Reformed doctrine of common grace were unfit to pass judgment on the Reformed character of Janssen's teachings, the more so since he made so very much of this particular truth. They simply could not be expected to give him a square deal.

It has always seemed to me that the attempts made through brochures and otherwise to create an

anti-Janssen atmosphere in the church before the Synod of 1922 was a breach of fairness.

The report of the advisory committee which recommended the deposition of Dr. Janssen by the Synod of Orange City in 1922, was written by two very able ministers. Synod adopted their report with only minor changes. Protests against this decision were raised before the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924. This body appointed a committee to study and answer the objections. And this committee was again headed by the two ministers just referred to. I question the fairness of this arrangement. No, it is not difficult to see why the Synod of 1924 assigned this work to these men. They were better posted than any others on the subject matter. And it does not enter my mind to question the perfectly sincere desire of these brethren to be eminently fair. But men are human. And how human it is to try to justify before the public a stand once taken! It is distasteful to say: "I was in error two years ago."

But I come to something more general. It is a recognized rule that a defendant should be regarded innocent until his guilt is proven. I fear that comparatively few of us have made a concerted attempt to live up to that rule in the doctrinal controversies of recent years. We have been altogether too ready to condemn. And that, I believe, accounts for much of the hard feeling that has been prevalent in our circles for some time.

In the spirit of Christian love we should have done

all in our power to save the brethren who were threatened with deposition. We should have remembered the exhortation of James: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." But who dares to say that we always did this? Was there not rather manifested a desire in some cases to get rid of a troublesome brother? I for one have no doubt at all that the Reverend Bultema, with a little more patience, could quite easily have been saved for the denomination.

The love of Christ requires that he who sees a brother err or suspects him of error, go to see him personally, in order, if possible, to correct him, before publishing the matter. This was not done in the case of Janssen. I am well aware of the attempts that have been made to show that it was not necessary in this instance, but the arguments raised have always struck me as sophistry. Even if it could be proven conclusively that in Matthew 18:15-18 Christ was thinking only of personal offenses and not of general sins, yet the principle stated in the first sentence of this paragraph would hold. And, by the way, it is not true at all what is said on page 46 of the semi-centennial volume of the Theological School and Calvin College, that the Synod of 1920 expressed as its opinion that this principle did not apply to the Janssen case. The motion was before

the house to disapprove of the action of Janssen's colleagues in bringing their suspicions to the attention of Curatorium before seeing him personally. It seemed that this motion would prevail. Then a good brother suggested that this point be dropped because of its personal implication. He did not like the idea of Synod's virtually rebuking our professors of theology. Thereupon the motion was voted down. But surely one does not need to take a university course in logic to see that not to decide that a thing should have been done is not necessarily equivalent to deciding that it need not have been done. I want to add that I believe that the practical application of the principle under discussion would be conducive in a remarkable degree to the peace of our Christian Reformed Zion.

If all the offensive personalities indulged in of recent years among us were to be retracted, what a piece of work that would be! Few of us that took an active part in the discussions can plead perfect innocence. Might not I and others have expressed ourselves more kindly? Dr. Janssen's public utterances sometimes bristled with personal charges. To the present day I refuse to believe that every one of the four professors and four ministers who published a somewhat unsavory brochure during the Janssen controversy was fully aware of its contents. And should not the brother who quoted: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? I hate them with perfect hatred" on the floor of the Orange City

Synod in plain reference to Dr. Janssen, have been publicly rebuked?

Quirinus Breen has gone from us. He has fallen under the spell of Modernism. The case is an exceedingly sad one. Are we sad? Do we feel truly sorry for him? I doubt not that many of us do. But the expressions of sadness have not been numerous. On the other hand, I have heard many speak of him in rather proud disdain. And to hardly anybody does it seem to occur that our denominational errors may have had something to do with his defection.

Would to God that I might have been spared the pain of writing the foregoing paragraphs of criticism! How gladly would I have left them unwritten! But I have long felt an irrepressible urge to say what I have said. Sense of duty bade me speak. I cannot agree with the many who say: "This case or that is a closed incident; let us forget about it." We have sinned. And only then can we afford to forget about our sins when we have humbly sought forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses from all sins, denominational as well as personal.

I would humbly call attention to a couple of lessons which the Christian Reformed Church, especially its ministry, may well learn from its late doctrinal controversies.

We are not well enough posted on Reformed doctrine. We have indeed the reputation of being exceptionally strong doctrinally. But we are not

nearly strong enough. Leading men among us highly recommended Bultema's *Maranatha* when first it appeared. For a long time Hoeksema's articles in *The Banner*, in which he flatly denied the doctrine of common grace, went unchallenged. I fear that our preaching is partly to blame for the fact that Hoeksema and Danhof have gained so large a following from our ranks. For comparatively few of us have dared boldly to proclaim that God's offer of salvation to all who hear the Gospel preached is perfectly sincere. We had a vague notion that this was Arminianism. Yet the professor of Homiletics at the seminary—be it said to his lasting honor—had long stressed this very truth.

What we Christian Reformed ministers sorely need to do is to make a thorough study of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. It would do our churches worlds of good.

Again, it is high time that we should apply ourselves to the study of Reformed church polity. Just let me mention two matters with reference to which we seem to be considerably at sea. What is the exact nature and extent of the authority of major assemblies over Consistories? And in what relation do secular jurisprudence and church law stand to one another? In how far do the general principles of the former hold for the latter? By the way, perhaps we may derive a little comfort from the fact that both of these questions seem to puzzle the authorities in the Netherlands almost as much as us. The debates

in connection with the Geelkerken trial give evidence to that effect.

By all means let us strive to preserve doctrinal balance. To stress certain truths at the expense of others often leads to serious consequences. Almost all heresies have originated in that way. It is my opinion that all our doctrinal difficulties of the last decade can be accounted for on this score.

To illustrate, let us be careful not to emphasize the supernatural origin of the Bible so strongly that our view of inspiration becomes mechanical, but, on the other hand, let us also beware, as of poison, of the leaven of those who stress the human element in Scripture at the expense of the divine. And let us preach both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, but may we be kept from placing undue emphasis on one or the other of these Scriptural truths.

This does not mean that we should always seek the so-called golden mean. Sometimes the mean is anything but golden. Such a policy would result in our filing the sharp edges off God's truth. Rather let us teach both extremes as God has given them in his Word. We should boldly proclaim the full counsel of God.

And let us, without ever sacrificing the truth, endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love."

Perils Besetting the
Christian Reformed Church

CHAPTER IV.

PERILS BESETTING THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

IT IS my purpose in a modest way to sound a note of warning. I would call attention to some perils that beset the Christian Reformed Church. As I see it, we are threatened from two directions. To use Biblical terms, we are in danger of Sadduceeism on the one hand, of Pharisaism on the other. But, without pressing these terms, let me mention some seven perils that strike me as being rather imminent.

(1) Let no one suppose that the Christian Reformed Church is so thoroughly sound that it is immune to the rot of *Modernism*. By this time we ought to know better. Recently one of our most promising young preachers, himself the son of one of our most highly respected older ministers, became a disciple of Harry Emerson Fosdick. A few of our "laymen" followed suit. What guarantee have we that this incident will not recur? Moreover, if there were a way of determining the exact number of those who deserted the Christian Reformed Church for the Modernist camp in the course of the last two decades, I doubt not that it would prove surprisingly large.

The rapidly growing number of our young people who are completing their education at our big Ameri-

can universities are in special danger. Almost all these institutions are hotbeds of Modernism. Now it goes without saying that as a rule an immature student is no match intellectually for his highly trained teachers. In an argument he is soon worsted. Not infrequently the consequence is that his faith is shaken. There is grave danger that he will lose his moorings and depart from historical orthodoxy.

But let me guard against misunderstanding. Let the reader not think that I would insinuate that our students, say at the University of Michigan, are not to be trusted. That very thing I have heard whispered, but the whisperers ought to be disciplined for bringing a whole class of people into disrepute. That is decidedly un-Christian. If anybody has positive proof that a certain student has turned Modernist, let him say so, if need be. But let no one under the guise of piety and orthodoxy flout the ninth commandment. As for me, I had the pleasure of spending a Sunday in January, 1925, with the Reformed and Christian Reformed students at Ann Arbor, and I want to testify to the impression that for the most part they are putting up a heroic and prayerful fight against odds to maintain the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Would I seek to dissuade the graduates of our Reformed colleges from pursuing post-graduate work at American universities? Not that either. It is impossible in this world of ours to avoid all dangers. It is not even policy to attempt it. To try it breeds

cowardice. Besides, we believe, do we not? the perseverance of saints. Once God the Holy Spirit has wrought faith in one's heart, one will always be a believer. All the theories of unbelief presented by the cleverest dialecticians cannot deprive one believer of true faith. Again, to have one's faith shaken temporarily by the winds of doubt, often results in its striking its roots down more deeply into the heart. Paradoxical though it may sound, he who never doubts seldom has a strong faith. And then, is it not true that many of the greatest men that the church of God has ever had were educated largely by the world? To mention just a few of recent date: both Kuyper and Bavinck were graduates of liberal Dutch universities.

But we may not tempt God. And we are in sacred duty bound to use all available means for the maintenance and strengthening of our faith. Therefore special pains should be taken at our own schools to forewarn and forearm the students against the wiles of Modernism. Nor should we stop there. I am convinced that we may not rest until we shall have established in America a full-fledged Reformed University.

Meanwhile let us remember that our students of today at the modern and Modernist universities will be our leaders tomorrow. A prayer for them, that they may continue loyal to the faith of their fathers, is a prayer for our children.

Modernism is rapidly being popularized. Time

there was when it was practically confined to a limited number of university professors. Today it is being instilled into the minds of children almost from the kindergarten up. Books on Modernism some years ago were found almost exclusively on the shelves of intellectual high-brows. Today books of fiction, magazines, and newspapers bristle with it. The day when Modernism was taught only at Yale and Union Seminaries is past. Hosts of pedantic preachers parcel it out to unsuspecting Sunday audiences over the length and the breadth of the land. Modernism is in the air.

Well may we plead on the promise: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." And let us not be remiss in performing the duty suggested by the words: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth."

(2) It is not a pleasant task to warn against the errors of *Fundamentalism*. We of Reformed persuasion have so much in common with the Fundamentalists, and our need of each other in the fight on Modernism is so great, that I would much rather make a plea for presenting a united front against the common foe. As a matter of fact, I do plead for that. Let us by all means give support to such organizations, for instance, as the League of Evangelical Students.

And yet a gentle warning is by no means super-

fluous. It would not be strange if, in our aversion from Modernism, some of us should turn Fundamentalists. Psychologically that could easily be explained. In fact, that is exactly what has happened to a limited number of our people. I am thinking of those who recently joined the so-called Open Bible Church. To me it seems that the Reverend Bultema too has erred in this direction.

But, as will be pointed out in another chapter, Fundamentalism is not Calvinism. And not Fundamentalism, but Calvinism, is the antidote for Modernism.

(3) Admittedly *worldliness* is threatening to engulf our Christian Reformed people. So important is the consideration of this peril that it deserves a whole chapter. At this point let it suffice to call attention to a few things which have contributed toward making this danger imminent.

About a generation ago the Christian Reformed people closely resembled a drop of oil floating on the waters of American life. They mixed hardly at all. Their isolation was not complete, of course; yet nearly so. And that condition was natural. The great majority of them were immigrants who understood neither the language nor the spirit of this land. Consequently it was not difficult for them to keep aloof from certain forms of worldliness. Today conditions are radically different. We have been Americanizing at rapid pace. Now most of us move quite freely in the American world. Small wonder that

we are learning to indulge in those forms of worldliness which are popular among Americans.

Our parents were comparatively poor. Some of us are rich, many more are well-to-do. And almost all of us can afford to be worldly. That is, we think we can. Fools that we are! Yes, let us be thankful that we are in a position to pay for legitimate pleasures. But let us never forget that we pay for the pleasures of sin with our souls. No one can afford that price. For what shall it profit a man if he revel in the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and lose his soul?

The war has something to do with the present situation. Wars usually have a powerful demoralizing influence, not only on the soldiers, but on the populace generally. In this respect the world war was no exception. Its aftermath, in the throes of which we find ourselves today, is unwonted lawlessness, especially among the young. That is why our city streets are littered with flappers and sheiks; why feminine modesty almost seems a thing of the past. Let us not flatter ourselves with the thought that our Christian Reformed young people have escaped this scourge.

To me it seems that a certain phase of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant has not been stressed sufficiently in recent years. I have in mind the truth that God's people differ from the world and ought to take a holy pride in differing. They are in a spiritual sense aristocrats. Children they are of the King. Alas, we are losing sight of that and have fallen to

imitating the common herd ; we are selling our birth-right for a mess of pottage. Daniels, Shadrachs, Mechechs, and Abednegos are becoming increasingly few.

If I were asked to list some of the greatest evils under the sun, I surely would assign a prominent place to mixed marriages. They are themselves a form of worldliness and usually lead to much more of it. Words cannot express how sorry I feel for the child of the covenant who marries an unbeliever. I am even more sorry for the offspring of such a union. But also this evil is becoming prevalent in our Christian Reformed circles.

Some of our people think that the doctrine of common grace tends to make people worldly. But that is plainly a fallacy. Common grace is unmistakably taught in Scripture. Let us beware of blaming the Bible and implicitly its divine Author for our sins. When we sin, *we* are to blame. To be sure, there are those who use the doctrine of common grace as an excuse for worldliness. Say they: "If God is good to all men and if there is much good in the world at large, then there is no good reason why we should stand aloof from the world." But what truth has never been abused? And it has never been the policy of the Christian church to hush up a truth because men did abuse it. Interesting enough, also the doctrine of predestination, which is strongly stressed by certain opponents of the doctrine of common grace, is sometimes employed as a cloak for sin. Not infre-

quently men say: "If I'm elected, I'll go to heaven anyhow; and if I'm a reprobate, my salvation is out of the question. So what matters it how I live?"

(4) The Christian Reformed Church not only is orthodox, but has shown repeatedly that it is firmly determined to remain orthodox. Splendid! What we need is not less of orthodoxy, but more of it. But is there not a possibility at least that we shall fall into the error of *orthodoxyism*? If we should, history would only be repeating itself. Struggles for orthodoxy have often been succeeded by periods of orthodoxyism.

Orthodoxy is essential to Christianity. Surely, one may err in certain points of doctrine and yet be a Christian. This can hardly be disputed. Any number of Methodists and Baptists are going to heaven. But there are some fundamental truths to which we must subscribe in order to merit the name of Christians. To mention just one, he who denies the Deity of Jesus Christ is not a Christian.

But orthodoxy is not Christianity itself. Sound doctrine stands in much the same relation to Christianity as do the bones of the body to the body itself. A body without bones is not thinkable. So Christianity is not possible without the truth. But the bones alone do not constitute the body; they make up a skeleton. Orthodoxy alone is a skeleton too. It is dead.

Our fathers were wont to distinguish between his-

torical and saving faith. The distinction is as sound as important. Historical faith is a mere intellectual acceptance of the truths of Holy Scripture without a change of heart. It is orthodoxy without Christianity. Even the demons have it. During Jesus' stay on earth they confessed him to be the Son of God. And James says: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble."

The Christian not only believes all that the Bible says about God. That in itself is mere historical faith. But, as the Apostles' Creed expresses it so precisely, he believes *in* God the Father, *in* God the Son, and *in* God the Holy Ghost. That is, he commits, entrusts, surrenders himself wholly to the Triune God. That is the very essence of Christianity.

By the way, strictly speaking, the Christian does not believe *in* anything or anybody besides God. He believes a holy catholic church, for example, but he does not believe *in* it. And to be very precise, while he surely does believe the Bible, he does not believe *in* it in the same sense in which he believes *in* God. For him the Bible is indeed God's infallible Word, but it is not his God. It is God's means unto salvation, but it is not the Savior.

And let it never be forgotten that the proof of saving faith is a life of love. If a man says he has faith, but does not lead a life of love, his faith is dead. "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and

though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."

(5) The Christian Reformed people on the whole have a profound respect for their Confessions. May that ever be the case! But God forbid that their regard for the Confessions should ever degenerate into *Confessionalism*.

What a pity that not one of our men who in the last decade departed from the Confessions submitted his views in the proper way to the church for study! Bultema, for instance, instead of seeking to propagate his peculiar views, which are so manifestly out of harmony with the Standards, should have presented them to the church with the request to apply to them the test of Scripture and, in case they should be found to be Scriptural, to modify the Confessions accordingly. Then the church would have been compelled to fall back upon the Bible, and, no matter to what conclusions it might have come, by so doing to express that the Bible stands above the Confessions. As it was, Bultema did no such thing, and all that the church had to do in order to dispose of his case was to appeal to the Confessions.

I am afraid that in consequence at least a few of our people are under the impression that the authority of the Confessions in matters of doctrine is very nearly tantamount to that of Scripture itself. But that, of course, is *confessionalism*.

The advisory committee which studied up the Danhof-Hoeksema case at the Synod of Kalamazoo

deserves high praise, it seems to me, for disproving the erroneous views of these brethren not only from the Confessions and from the writings of leading Reformed theologians, but from the Bible as well. Technically, it was not at all obliged to do that. But to do so was the part of wisdom. The danger of confessionalism was lessened.

Let me state here parenthetically that I am sorry that the Janssen case could not be threshed out more thoroughly. If the church had gone to the very bottom of the matter, it would have come face to face with a most interesting and equally difficult question. Janssen's method of teaching the Old Testament was strongly apologetic. Now among the ablest Reformed theologians there are two widely divergent views on the value of Apologetics. In the December, 1921, issue of *Religion and Culture* I called attention to the difference. We might speak of two schools: the Dutch, represented by such men as Kuyper and Bavinck, and the Scottish, with Orr, Beattie, and Warfield as its spokesmen. To put the matter very generally, the latter school makes a great deal more of Apologetics than does the former. Janssen, having been a pupil of Orr's for some time, had strong leanings in that direction. Shall the church tolerate both views or must it choose between them? The Reverend G. H. Hospers of Ontario, N. Y., has sought to answer this question in a recent pamphlet. And the time may yet come when the church will

have to give its answer. Scripture will have to be the norm.

Some years ago I heard a noted Reformed theologian from the Netherlands, whose orthodoxy, so far as I know, has never been seriously questioned, say that in his teaching he considered himself bound by the Confessions in matters of doctrine, but not necessarily, to use his own words, "in exegeticis" or "in isagogicis." When he spoke of "in exegeticis," he referred to such interpretations of Scripture as one given in Article 37 of the Belgic Confession, where "the books" which will be opened on judgment day are said to be "the consciences." And the reference of "in isagogicis" was to Article 4, which assigns the authorship of Hebrews to Paul. The statement surprised me. I have often thought of it since. It still seems to me that this esteemed theologian took a perilous position. Or is it possible that he was right and that my vision is somewhat blurred by confessionalism?

Of another matter I am quite certain. When our Reformed fathers wrote the Confessions, they intended that these documents should be revised from time to time with a view to heresies that might in the future arise, and in accordance with additional light on the truths of Scripture which the Holy Spirit might be pleased to give to the church. I believe that the time has come for us to do something along this line, even as the Reformed Churches of the Nether-

lands have begun to do. I wonder whether we are ready?

(6) I fear that we are in at least slight danger of falling prey to the evil of *legalism*.

There has been some anarchy among us of late. Certain brethren flatly refused to submit to the authority of church assemblies in spite of the fact that they themselves had promised submission. Many of us justly resented this. But now there is danger that, in our displeasure, we shall lose sight of the fact that the authority of the church is purely spiritual.

Classical minutes and Synodical Acta show that our church assemblies have in recent years been frequently compelled to act as courts. Let us not get the impression that they are courts primarily. Only in exceptional cases do they convene as courts. So far as possible, let us avoid calling them courts. The word suggests legalism.

It has been suggested that Synod seek to stem the rising tide of worldliness among us by making certain laws. While a limited number of rules and regulations are necessary, it should be remembered that Synods are not exactly legislatures. It has always been Reformed policy scrupulously to avoid adding precept to precept. And let us not suppose that laws make men better. It takes God's Spirit to do that.

By all means let us avoid the sin of placing human usages and traditions on a level with divine ordinances. That were rank Pharisaism. It may

look like piety, but it is sacrilege. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that there is a tendency in that direction among us. In a plea for catechismal preaching a minister once made the admission that the Bible does not require it. A few members of the Christian Reformed church were somewhat alarmed. In a recent lecture I made a mild plea for adding a few hymns to our Psalms for public worship. I was severely criticized. Experience has taught me that, while many of our people need to be admonished to keep the Sabbath, there are a number who may well be reminded of the Savior's statement that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. "We reject all human inventions, and all laws, which men would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any way whatever."—Belgic Confession, Article 32.

Of late it has become customary in Christian Reformed circles to speak of Synodical interpretations of the Confessions, and these interpretations are regarded binding on the members of the church in the same degree as the Confessions themselves. I am afraid that we are on a dangerous road. If we continue to travel it, we shall get line upon line, precept upon precept. Let us not say, for example, that the Synod of Kalamazoo in the matter of common grace added an interpretation to the Confessions, but rather that it merely pointed out that certain brethren had contradicted the Confessions. On page 44 of his *Reformed Pharisaism?* the Reverend K. Schilder

boasts that, while some Presbyterian churches of Scotland and America have added interpretations to their Confessions, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have consistently refused to do this. Let us play safe by following the example of our Dutch mother!

(7) Closely related to the peril of legalism is that of *uniformity*.

In things indifferent; that is, in matters which are neither prescribed nor forbidden by the Bible, let us not try to bind one another.

The great majority of our Christian Reformed churches do not have a choir. A few of our churches find that they can worship more acceptably with the aid of a choir. Why should they not have one?

How broadminded, how tolerant, was the older generation of our Christian Reformed ministers! It was my good fortune to have one of them as my father. In the parental home I have overheard doctrinal conversations by such men as Beuker, Boer, Hemkes, the Broenes, Hulst, Van Hoogen, Van Goor, Vander Werp, to mention no more. How they differed! How frankly they discussed their differences! Some of the views which they expressed would today surely elicit the cry of "Wolf!" in our circles. But they were no heresy-hunters. Most of them had hearts as big as hams.

In its zeal for purity of doctrine, let the Christian Reformed Church beware lest it bring upon itself the curse of uniformity. It may never be forgotten

that faithfulness to the Standards is perfectly consistent with differences of opinion on extra-confessional matters. The church which loses sight of this is a sure candidate for petrification.

In conclusion I must indicate how the aforementioned perils may be avoided. One word says it all. That word is *Spirituality*.

If we are led by the Spirit of truth, we shall avoid the pitfall of Modernism and the one-sidedness of Fundamentalism.

If we are controlled by the Spirit of holiness, we shall flee from the sin of worldliness.

If we have the Spirit of Christ, we shall be, not merely orthodox, but Christian as well, and thus escape orthodoxism.

If the Spirit of God dwells in us, we shall ever esteem God's Word more highly than that of the church and so steer clear of confessionism.

If God's free Spirit be ours, we shall be free from the sin of legalism.

And, paradoxical though it may seem, if we all have one Spirit, we shall differ from each other and yet agree. With diversity in form we shall "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

There is nothing that the Christian Reformed Church needs quite so much as a spiritual revival.

Modernism and Fundamentalism

CHAPTER V.

MODERNISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

THE Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church are pretty well agreed in their attitude toward the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.

How I wish that for *pretty well* I might substitute *perfectly*! But I cannot do that with complete honesty. The reason was already suggested, and will appear again in the following chapter. Suffice it now to say that *pretty well* expresses exactly how I have the situation sized up.

Both denominations, generally speaking, are down on Modernism. How very true that is of the Christian Reformed Church appears from the fact that it proceeded to the deposition of a professor of theology whose teaching appeared to do violence to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture, in spite of his repeated protestations that he subscribed to this truth as wholeheartedly as anybody. It is not so generally known, but equally true, that a couple of years ago the young minister of an eastern Reformed church was summarily discharged when it appeared that he called into question the virgin birth. The weekly papers of both churches have denounced Modernism in very certain terms. Neither

church is torn by Fundamentalist-Modernist strife, as are so many American Protestant denominations.

What else could be expected? Modernism is perfectly despicable. Instead of being modern, it is only a revival of time-worn heresies. Any serious student of history ought to see almost at a glance that it is away behind the times. How much there is in it of seventeenth-century Socinianism and eighteenth-century Rationalism! Instead of being liberal, it is narrow to the point of intolerance and bigotry. It would sneer Fundamentalism out of court. Instead of being scholarly, as it claims to be, it betrays at almost every turn unpardonable ignorance of the teachings of historical Christianity. Just to illustrate: in Chapter Three of *Christianity and Modern Thought*, Dr. Richard S. Lull of Yale University writes: "Mr. Bryan's text, *In His Image*, based upon a deep and widespread conviction that man was created in the physical image of his Maker, pictures God the Infinite in terms of a finite being." What a caricature of the orthodox position! Yet Mr. Lull is manifestly in earnest. He does not mean to joke.

Modernism is damnable. It would knock the props from under the Christian religion by denying the infallibility of the Scriptures. It would tear the very heart out of Christianity by labeling the doctrine of the vicarious atonement "theology of the butcher shop." It would demolish the foundation of the Christian church by placing the divinity of Christ on a level with that of man. It would force

Christian ethics by foisting upon simple men and women and children a false theology couched in terms of the only true. It would pluck the crown from the all-glorious head of the Christ himself by assigning to him a place—the first, to be sure—in a class with Buddha and Confucius. It would annihilate the one religion that can make men happy now and eternally by denying at every turn the supernatural.

Can a Modernist go to heaven? Differently expressed, can a Modernist be a Christian? That question is frequently asked nowadays. It requires some sort of answer.

Let us be guarded in our reply. It is usually a precarious thing for one man to pass judgment on another's salvation or damnation. Many well-meaning Christians are altogether too hasty about this. Let each one look out for himself in the first place. When asked whether few would be saved, the Lord replied: "Do *you* strive to enter in at the narrow gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and will not be able." Besides, the subject of the relation of orthodoxy to Christianity is as difficult as it is big. It is generally agreed that one may be off at least a few shades on orthodoxy and yet be saved. Fortunate for you and for me! We are off a little. Everybody is. Nobody's theology is altogether free from error and perfectly pure.

But it is possible to draw a line somewhere. Did not Paul command Titus: "A man that is a heretic

after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself"? And did not the same apostle make bold to declare: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed"?

Apart from the question, which particular theory of inspiration is correct, it must be said that he who rejects the Bible as God's inspired Word thereby gives evidence that he has not received the Holy Spirit. Everybody who, having been born of the Spirit, is a child of God, recognizes his Father's voice in Holy Writ. Again, the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ may well be called the shibboleth of Christianity. "He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." Once more, he that trusts for salvation in character rather than in the atonement—and this seems to be characteristic of Modernism—is building on sinking sand, which is sure to give way when the storm of judgment is unleashed.

What has just been said about Modernism will strike the reader as being so very obvious, I trust that further enlargement is unnecessary. But now we come to something which is not so apparent a first blush. Fuller elucidation is required.

I hope the reader will not be so naive as to infer from the denunciation of Modernism by the Re-

formed and Christian Reformed denominations, that these churches have sworn unreserved allegiance to the cause of Fundamentalism. That is not the case.

Both adhere, generally speaking, to the fundamental teachings of the Christian religion, which are best expressed by the Apostles' Creed. But neither church is found bodily in the Fundamentalist camp. They stand for fundamentalism alright, but not altogether for "Fundamentalism." They cannot be classed as "Fundamentalist churches" with the connotation which this term has through usage acquired.

The objection which the Reformed or Calvinistic Christian has to Fundamentalism may, I believe, be stated in these few words: there is in it a rather pronounced strain of Anabaptism.

Says the great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck in his lecture on *Common Grace*: "The after-effects of Anabaptism are noticeable not only in Mennonitism, but also in Labadism, Pietism, and Herrnhutism of Continental Europe, and in English and American Independentism and the Baptist groups, Quakerism and Methodism." Note that he mentions the Baptists and Methodists. Are not these the names of our two largest Protestant denominations? And is it not true that the spirit of Methodism pervades almost all the Protestant churches of America?

This is not the place for a thorough study of Anabaptism. But let me call attention briefly to at least

a couple of evidences of the working of Anabaptistic leaven in American Fundamentalism.

Anabaptism stands for Premillennialism. Our Fundamentalist churches have placed the teaching of the premillennial return of Christ on the list of fundamental Christian doctrines. He who will not subscribe to it is, to say the least, suspected of leanings toward Modernism.

Perhaps the most general characteristic of Anabaptism is that it teaches a dualism of nature and grace, of the natural and the supernatural. It denies that the two can be harmonized. It even drives a wedge in between them. And then it proceeds to extol the supernatural at the expense of the natural; or, to put it more precisely, it underestimates nature in favor of grace. Much the same thing, I fear, is true of present-day Fundamentalism.

Let me offer some concrete evidence.

How very poor a showing many a Fundamentalist has made in an argument with a Modernist! This, I fear, is not accidental. The Fundamentalists do not value sufficiently a broad liberal education as the foundation of theological training. Every once in a while a Fundamentalist betrays his ignorance of the distinction between mechanical and organic inspiration and fails to do justice to the human element in the writing of the Scriptures. How wary many Fundamentalists are of admitting that God frequently employs natural means in performing miracles, in themselves supernatural. Who has never

heard a Fundamentalist speak of the catastrophe which is to end this dispensation as a destruction of the present order of things, to be followed by an entirely new creation, rather than an act of purification issuing in the restoration of all things? And would not many a well-meaning but short-sighted teacher of Christianity hesitate to admit that the student who neglects his Aristotle in order to engage in city mission work may for all that be a poorer Christian than his roommate who makes so thorough a study of this pagan philosopher that he has no time left for evangelical work; that the business man who bungles his income tax return in order to attend prayer-meeting is not necessarily more spiritual than another who is so scrupulously exact about the same piece of work that he fails to hear the striking of the sweet hour of prayer; and that the woman who is rearing so large a family that she has little or no time left for church work may well receive a richer reward in heaven than her sister without children who is president of the Ladies' Aid or the Ladies' Missionary Society?

And now I must call attention to a very remarkable phenomenon. Bavinck points it out in the lecture already referred to in this chapter. The issue between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists may be expressed by the one word *supernatural*. The thorough-going Modernist denies the supernatural, as, for instance, the inspiration of the Scrip-

tures, the virgin birth of Jesus and his bodily resurrection, the miracles in general, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit; while the Fundamentalist clings to the supernatural tooth and nail. Of course, the Fundamentalist is right, the Modernist dead wrong. And yet, very, very strange to say, both proceed from essentially the same erroneous principle. Both deny that the supernatural and the natural can be harmonized. So the Modernist throws overboard the supernatural, while many a Fundamentalist fails to do justice to the natural.

The Reformed position is quite another. It gives just as full recognition to the supernatural as any Fundamentalist can. At the same time it highly exalts the natural by maintaining that it too is of God. And while it does not claim for a moment that paltry human reason can harmonize the two, it does believe that somewhere they meet, embrace, and kiss each other. Says the learned Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics*: "On the stand-point of Scripture, all revelation, also that in nature, is supernatural."—Volume I, page 317. "And even supernatural revelation is not at variance with nature, for every man in his inmost being is a supernaturalist and believes in a direct working of God in this world.—Volume I, page 377.

Where then does the Reformed Christian stand?

He denounces Modernism.

He esteems the Fundamentalist as a brother in Christ and gladly fights shoulder to shoulder with

him for the fundamental truths of our supernatural religion. But he keenly regrets his companion's errors and does not hesitate to point them out in the spirit of love.

In his opposition to Modernism he is controlled by the conviction that Calvinism, not Fundamentalism, is at once its real antipode and its effective antidote.

Christianity and Calvinism

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTIANITY AND CALVINISM

IT IS often asked: "Is it worth while to be a Calvinist? Does it not suffice to be a Christian? If only I make sure of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, do I need to bother about being a follower of John Calvin? Granted that I am an adherent of the Christian religion, is it of any real value that I subscribe to that particular interpretation of it which was sponsored especially by the Genevan reformer? Compared with the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity, are not the five points of Calvinism quite insignificant?"

I am going to give an answer to such questioning.

That there are hosts of very fine Christian men and women outside the Reformed fold is so obvious a truth that it seems almost foolish to say so. And the most partisan Calvinist will grant readily that it is far more important to be a Christian than to be a Calvinist. Nay, the intelligent Calvinist will not even express himself thus. In view of the matchless glory of the Christ, the latchet of whose sandals John Calvin is not worthy, kneeling down, to loose, he resents the very suggestion of thus comparing Calvinism with Christianity. He is not a Christian in the first place, a Calvinist in the second. He would be a Christian first and last and always.

Let no one infer that it is of little value to be specifically Reformed. I verily believe that it is a matter of stupendous importance.

It is thought quite generally that such interpretations of Christianity as Lutheranism, Methodism, and Calvinism, to enumerate no more, are all of them about equally valid, that the difference is almost entirely one of emphasis, that it is well that each stresses certain points which the others fail to stress sufficiently, and that, in choosing among them, one may safely be guided by taste, temperament, and tradition.

It must be granted that there is an element of truth in this reasoning. The most ardent Calvinist, for instance, can hardly maintain that his interpretation of the Christian religion is perfectly full-orbed, and that no other interpretation contains aught to supplement it. And yet with the chief contention of this presentation of the matter I cannot agree at all.

Says Dr. B. B. Warfield in his article *Calvinism* in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*: "Calvinism is not a specific variety of theism, religion, evangelicalism, set over against other specific varieties, which along with it constitute these several genera, and which possess equal rights of existence with it and make similar claims to perfection, each after its own kind. It differs from them not as one species differs from other species; but as a perfectly developed representative differs

from an imperfectly developed representative of the same species. There are not many kinds of theism, religion, evangelicalism, among which men are at liberty to choose to suit at will their individual taste or meet their special need, all of which may be presumed to serve each its own specific uses equally worthily. . . . Calvinism conceives of itself as simply the more pure theism, religion, evangelicalism, superseding as such the less pure."

Let me express the same thought in language less Warfieldian. Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Methodism cannot be represented in their relation to each other by three perfectly good apples of different varieties; say a Northern Spy, a Baldwin, and a Jonathan. If so, it would be a matter purely of taste which one should choose. I prefer the Spy; but it would be perfectly foolish for me to start an argument with my neighbor who may chance to like the Baldwin better. He has as much right to his preference as have I to mine. Matters of taste are hardly debatable. A good Jonathan is as good in its kind as is a good Spy in its kind. But, as was said, this illustration does not fill the bill. Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Methodism may well be compared to three apples of the same variety, whether Spy, Baldwin, Jonathan, or any other. But these three apples, while all of the same kind, are not equally good. The two representing Lutheranism and Methodism are more or less spotted, even worm-

eaten perhaps. The one which stands for Calvinism is a pretty nearly perfect specimen.

Or let us say that three archers are shooting at a target. They are respectively a Lutheran, a Methodist, and a Calvinist. Is it so that the arrows of the three strike the target at different places, the first above, the second below, and the third to the right of the center, but all at equal distances from the bull's eye? Not at all. But this is the case: the Calvinist hits the bull's eye pretty squarely, while his two companions hit the target alright, but not the bull's eye.

In a word, Calvinism is the most nearly perfect interpretation of Christianity. In final analysis, Calvinism and Christianity are practically synonymous.

It follows that he who departs from Calvinism is taking a step away from Christianity; that he who ignores specifically Reformed doctrine is endangering his doctrinal position as a Christian; that he who lets go of the five points of Calvinism is slipping in the direction of Modernism.

Here let me quote a very bold statement from Dr. Warfield's article on *Calvinism*. Presumptuous though it may seem, it is absolutely correct. "It may be contended that the future, as the past, of Christianity itself is bound up with the fortunes of Calvinism."

An illustration is in order. The basic principle of Calvinism, of course, is the sovereignty of God.

And one of the most beloved teachings of evangelical Christianity generally is that of salvation by grace. But how very evident that the two stand and fall together! Salvation by grace is but a corollary of the sovereignty of God. The Calvinist says that God in his sovereign good pleasure elected certain men unto eternal life. Therefore he gives to these at some time during their life on earth the grace of regeneration, by which naturally dead sinners are made alive. This grace, and it alone, accounts for their acceptance of the Christ and his benefits by faith. That is real sovereignty and real grace. But the Arminian Methodist at best says that God elected certain men to eternal life, not in his sovereign good pleasure, but because he foresaw that they would believe. The natural man is not dead spiritually, only sick, and not too sick to accept of his own free will God's offer of salvation in the Christ. Manifestly that is neither sovereignty nor grace. The Arminian begins by qualifying divine sovereignty; he ends up by taking much of the grace out of grace. According to him the Savior is indeed a gift of God's grace, but the sinner's acceptance of the Savior is not due solely to divine grace. But is it not obvious that he thus comes dangerously near to Liberalism? One of the characteristic teachings of present-day Modernists is that man, with the aid of divine influence, becomes his own savior.

In view of the foregoing, I am less surprised than grieved to find in the Reformed Church in America

an inclination toward Modernism. What else can be expected? Simon-pure Calvinism is being neglected. The five points of Calvinism are gradually allowed to go by the board. And thus it becomes inevitable that generally Christian doctrines should suffer.

I have already called attention to it that Dr. Worcester shows a tendency to depart from some of the fundamentals. About that no more need be said. But some additional evidence is in order.

Said the Reverend E. C. Vanderlaan in the November 28, 1925, issue of *The Christian Intelligencer*: "One does not want to make reckless assertions about Modernism, for there is no way of finding out how many Modernists there may be in our church."

Dr. William Bancroft Hill, President of the 1925 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, in a sermon delivered before that body made this statement, according to *The Leader* of June 17: "But I am not leading up to a discussion of the Fundamentalist and the Modernist. We have both, I doubt not, in our denomination; and each causes the other pain; but thus far, thank God, they have borne patiently with one another, each considering the other a weak brother who should not be made to stumble because for him Christ died. May this spirit of brotherly charity continue, as I trust it will, until both gain fully the insight of John."

Every once in a while one hears it said in Christian Reformed circles that this is no time for insist-

ing on the niceties of Calvinism, that now we should bring all our strength to bear on the maintenance of the fundamentals of Christianity itself. Without questioning the good intentions of those who speak thus, I want to say that this line of talk is superficial, misleading even, and hence dangerous. It is always time to insist on Calvinism of the purest brand. "Obsta principiis!" "Withstand beginnings!" Add water to the wine of Reformed doctrine, and you have begun to weaken your Christianity. For in last instance the fundamentals of Calvinism are also the fundamentals of the Christian religion.

I want to conclude this chapter on *Christianity and Calvinism* by registering the belief that every true Christian, whatever label he may bear, is at heart a Calvinist. He may not call himself a Calvinist; he may even resent being called by this name; his thinking may be far from consistently Reformed; yet, in final analysis he is Reformed.

May not a Calvinist be described as a person who lives in utter dependence on God? But also the Arminian Christian humbly recognizes his dependence when engaged in the act of prayer. There is truth in the oft repeated saying that an Arminian is a Calvinist when on his knees before God. Is it not the glory of Reformed theology that it has held with unwavering consistency to the doctrine of salvation by grace? But also our Methodist brethren and sisters sing very heartily of being "Saved by Grace." The Calvinist aims in all his living at the

glory of God. But may not much the same thing be said of every one who truly knows and loves God? Surely every Christian loves God above all else. Will he then not as a matter of course seek to live wholly for God?

To quote Dr. Warfield, that eminent American Calvinist, once more: "Whoever believes in God; whoever recognizes in the recesses of his soul his utter dependence on God; whoever in all his thoughts of salvation hears in his heart of hearts the echo of the *solī Deo gloria* of the evangelical profession—by whatever name he may call himself, or by whatever intellectual puzzles his logical understanding may be confused—Calvinism recognizes as implicitly a Calvinist, and as only requiring to permit these fundamental principles—which underlie and give its body to all true religion—to work themselves freely and fully out in thought and feeling and action, to become explicitly a Calvinist."

The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOCTRINE OF ABSOLUTE PREDESTINATION

WHILE it is beside the purpose of this book to give an exposition of Reformed doctrine, yet I feel that a few remarks on the doctrine of predestination are called for.

This doctrine may well be called the hall-mark of Calvinism. To be sure, it is not its formative principle, the root from which its springs. The sovereignty of God is that. But it is the most direct logical consequence of this principle. God's sovereignty reveals itself most manifestly in predestination.

Now this distinctively Reformed doctrine is exceedingly unpopular today. Those who are willing to subscribe to it have become few indeed. It is the butt of many a joke in would-be-theological circles. Several churches which are Reformed in name largely ignore it. Not a few members of the Reformed Church in America reject it. Some members of the Christian Reformed Church too are beginning to question it.

I believe it is high time that this doctrine be reasserted. If it is not, I am afraid that Calvinism will well nigh perish from the land.

The Bible teaches plainly in several places that

already in eternity, before the world was, God chose or elected from the human race which was to be created, some unto eternal life, and passed by, and thus virtually rejected, the others. That is a simple statement of the doctrine of predestination. The reader may check up on it by referring to such passages as Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:4, 5; I Thessalonians 1:4; I Peter 1:2; I Peter 2:7-9.

We come at once to a point of unusual importance. It may be called the crux of the whole matter. One might subscribe to the doctrine as stated in the previous paragraph without yet being Reformed. Many an Arminian would raise no objection to it at all. But the question arises *why* God chose some and not others. The Arminian replies that God was guided by his foreknowledge, that he chose some because he saw beforehand that they would believe the Gospel and rejected others because he knew that they would not do so. The Calvinist, on the other hand, maintains that God was guided by nothing but his own good pleasure, his sovereign, free will. That is the very heart of the Reformed doctrine of *absolute* predestination.

To put the difference between the Reformed and the Arminian views of predestination succinctly: according to the former, faith is the fruit of election; according to the latter, faith is the ground of election; according to the former, the ground of election lies in God; according to the latter, the ground of election lies in man.

It is not at all difficult to show that the Reformed doctrine of absolute predestination is Biblical. Ephesians 1:4, 5 teaches it plainly. Writes the apostle: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." With almost startling boldness the apostle proclaims the same truth in Romans 9. Everybody who calls the doctrine into question should by all means read this chapter as a whole. I quote but a few verses. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."—vs. 16. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."—vs. 18. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he hath afore prepared unto glory?"—vss. 21-23.

The Reformed doctrine of predestination is very generally misunderstood today. It is often identified with philosophic determinism or Mohammedan fatalism. Now I do believe that sometimes individuals who call themselves Reformed, and even boast of their strict Calvinism, fall into the error of de-

terminism or fatalism. But it is exceedingly unfair to charge this error to the account of Calvinism itself.

Let me mention just two points of difference between fatalism and Calvinism. Fate is an impersonal, cold, hard, relentless force, but the God of the Calvinist is a personal being with love as his very essence, good in many ways even to the reprobate. And while fatalism leaves no room for the freedom of the human will, Calvinism teaches that the will of man is indeed not altogether free, controlled as it is by the heart, which in the case of the unregenerated is evil, so that he cannot will spiritual good, but it is free to this extent that no outside force compels it.

It may be well to meet a few objections that are commonly raised against our doctrine. At the very outset it should be realized that we are face to face with a mystery. Far be it from us to claim that we can remove every difficulty by human logic! We frankly admit that we cannot. But this does not perturb us. How can we with our finite and corrupted intellects expect to comprehend the infinite God? We ought to be exceedingly grateful to have a God who is far too great for us to understand. "And therefore with holy adoration of these mysteries, we exclaim in the words of the apostle: 'O depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments,

and his ways past finding out!" —Canons of Dordt, I, 18.

The decree of reprobation "by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy) but declares him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof." —Canons of Dordt, I, 15.

It is often said that the doctrine of reprobation makes God unjust, tyrannical, cruel, since, according to it, he sentenced certain men to everlasting perdition long before they had the opportunity to do either good or evil.

Several attempts have been made to answer this charge. For example, it has been said that in the decree of predestination God regarded man as having fallen, and consequently he would have been perfectly just in sentencing *all* men to eternal torment. This is in harmony with the so-called infralapsarian view of predestination, which is plainly taught in the Canons when it is said that God chose "from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ."—I, 7.

The Bible gives a pointed reply to the charge of injustice on the part of God in the decree of reprobation. This reply, while not intended to satisfy human reason, is absolutely conclusive. Having illustrated election and reprobation by the cases of Jacob and Esau, the former of whom God loved,

while he hated the latter, "the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil," Paul raises the question: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" What is his reply? "God forbid!" And then follows a simple appeal to the divine sovereignty. "For he saith to Moses: 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.'"—Romans 9:11-15. This appeal should silence all opposition.

Once in a while some such reasoning as the following is heard: "If I am elected unto eternal life, I will get to heaven in the end, no matter how I live now; and if I am one of the reprobate, I am sure to go to hell, no matter how hard I strive to enter in by the narrow gate. So what am I going to do about it? I might as well eat and drink and be merry and ignore the whole matter of my salvation." This line of talk involves the charge that divine predestination rules out human responsibility.

While we do not flatter ourselves with the hope of harmonizing these two teachings of Scripture before the bar of human reason, it is not at all difficult to point out a serious flaw in the reasoning just indicated. The fact is overlooked that God fore-ordained not only a certain end, but also the means by which this end would be reached. God determined not merely that a given farmer would harvest a thousand bushels of wheat in the summer of 1926, but that he would obtain this harvest by fertilizing,

plowing, and sowing. The means and the end are inseparable. The farmer who fails to make the necessary preparations is going to have no harvest. In precisely the same way God determined not merely that a certain individual would inherit the rest of heaven, but that he would get there through laboring to enter in. Here too let man not put asunder what God has joined together. He who attempts it will lose his soul.

Again we refer to Romans 9. Already in the days of Paul there were those who argued that predestination, in particular reprobation, left no room for human responsibility. And the apostle answered also this charge not by argument, but by an appeal to divine sovereignty. "Thou wilt say then unto me, 'Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?' Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, 'Why hast thou made me thus?' " —vss. 19, 20. "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him."

As it is impossible for us petty men to square with one another divine predestination and human responsibility, so no one has ever succeeded in fully harmonizing the decree of reprobation with the sincere offer of salvation which God makes to sinners in general and which he is pleased to have them accept, since he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked but therein that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live.

But what of it? Both are unmistakably taught in Scripture. The same Jesus who declared: "No man can come to me except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him"—John 6:44—, wailed over the city of Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!"—Luke 13:34. And how much there is in divine revelation that far transcends human reason! The thing for us to do is to bow in humble adoration and say: "Lord, we fail to understand, but we believe because thou sayest it." And then let us beware of stressing either truth at the expense of the other. To emphasize God's good pleasure in the sinner's salvation at the expense of reprobation leads unavoidably to Arminianism. To do the reverse leads to heresy just as reprehensible.

Almost all the objections that men are wont to make to predestination concern reprobation rather than election. Now let me add that the best Reformed theologians have ever been too well balanced to co-ordinate these two phases of our doctrine. Says Bavinck in his *Dogmatics*: "The highest form of the eternal plan is God's decree concerning the revelation of his perfections in the eternal glorious state of his rational creatures. To it reprobation is wholly subordinate. It is the dark reverse over against which election stands forth most brilliantly."—Volume II, page 417.

Something must be said about the proper use of this doctrine.

It is not wise greatly to trouble the unsaved about it. They should be told of Paul's reply to the jailer's question, what he had to do to be saved: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But those who are saved through faith in the Christ may find unspeakable comfort in it.

Let me use an old illustration. We often speak of the house of salvation. Among other things a house has a foundation and a door. Of this house election is the foundation, Christ is the door. Those who are still without should be pointed to the door. Surely, it is well when describing the house to them in the invitation to enter, also to call their attention to the strength of its foundation. Yet they should be told not to attempt to enter in by way of the foundation, but through the door. But once they are inside, what comfort, what peace, what joy, may they not derive from the knowledge that the house of their salvation stands absolutely secure on the unmoveable foundation of God's eternal decree! "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: the Lord knoweth them that are his." He has known them from eternity.

There are many teachers of religion who, while professing belief in the doctrine of predestination, yet virtually ignore it. "This truth," say they, "is of academic interest rather than practical. Then why bother the ordinary church-member about it?

There is even a danger that he will abuse it. It has been known to 'make men careless and profane.' " Over against this attitude I would emphasize the great necessity of preaching predestination.

The whole system of Reformed doctrine stands or falls with predestination. It is the foundation. Break it away, and the superstructure will topple into ruins. It was no accident, but the result of logical reasoning, that the Arminians denied the other four points of Calvinism as well as absolute predestination. Particular redemption, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of saints are corollaries of this dogma. Absolute predestination then is the shibboleth of the Reformed faith. By denying it one loses all claim to the name Reformed as well as to a place in a Reformed church. Just as soon as we decide to shelve this doctrine, we may as well go out of business as Reformed churches and combine with other bodies of Christians.

One of the logical conclusions of predestination is the perseverance of saints. Who dares to deny practical value to this doctrine? The comfort alone which it gives far exceeds in value all the gold and silver, the precious stones and pearls, of the earth and its seas. The assurance which it offers is thrice blessed indeed. Dispelling worry, it liberates the powers of the soul for service in the kingdom. The solid joy which it yields may well stir in those outside the kingdom a holy jealousy and an ardent zeal to enter in, yea, to "take it by force."

How very evident that with the dogma of predestination is bound up inseparably that doctrine which lies at the very heart of evangelical Christianity: salvation by grace. Begin with absolute predestination, reason on, and you are driven irresistibly to the conclusion that the sinner is saved by free mercy. Begin with salvation by grace, reason backward, and you cannot help concluding that the sovereign God for reasons in himself determined to save certain sinners. Absolute predestination is an absolutely essential element in evangelical religion. Without it its central truth of complete dependence on the grace of God cannot be maintained. Begin to moderate it; say, for instance, that God chose certain individuals unto eternal life because he foresaw that they would believe in Christ, and you have already denied salvation by pure grace. Therefore it is not surprising to find that practically all the sixteenth-century Reformers were a unit on this matter. Luther and Melancton, even Butzer, as well as Zwingli and Calvin, were jealous for absolute predestination. Dr. Warfield is authority for the statement that "it underlay and gave its form and power to the whole Reformation movement."

Calvinists often speak of "the glory of God." The genuine Calvinist lives unto God's glory. No wonder! He realizes that it is God who has chosen him and not he who has chosen God, that God chose him sovereignly and not at all because he deserved it in any way, and that the whole process of his salvation

from start to finish is due to this choice of God. Otherwise expressed, God does not merely make salvation possible by giving his Son and then help man to save himself through the influence of his Spirit, but God actually saves. Then, of course, God gets all the honor. "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen!" "Soli Deo Gloria!"

The Importance of the Doctrine of
Common Grace for the Church of Today

CHAPTER VIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF COMMON GRACE FOR THE CHURCH OF TODAY

IT is my intention to write, not on the value of the doctrine of common grace in general, but specifically on the importance of this truth for the church of today. As I do so, I reproduce in the main a paper which I read before the Western Social Conference of the Reformed Church, attended mostly by ministers, in the spring of 1924. It was printed in its entirety in *The Leader*.

May I not assume that my readers know in a general way what Reformed theologians mean by common grace? Most of us have in mind the now famous three points established by the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo. Their essence is: that God in a sense is good to all men; that God restrains sin in the individual and in the race; and that the unregenerated can do civic good. Of course there is much more to the doctrine, but let this suffice for the present.

Let me suggest a couple of considerations that prompt me to write on the subject.

Our Reformed people of Dutch descent can hardly be said to value the doctrine of common grace very highly. Nor should they be blamed for this attitude.

Historically, it is easily explained. The founders of the western branch of the Reformed Church in America, as well as of the Christian Reformed Church, took an active and leading part in the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands. The early settlers were almost, if not entirely, all seceders. And likely the majority of later immigrants who united with these churches were of seceder stock. Now it is generally admitted that the men of 1834 never made much of the doctrine of common grace, not nearly so much as, for instance, the so-called "doleerenden" of 1886. They could not, for the doctrine had not been developed and propagated as it was subsequently by Bavinck and Kuyper.

I come to a fact of more importance. It must be obvious to every Reformed observer that the orthodox forces in the Christian churches of America generally are guilty of neglect of the truth of common grace. I do not hesitate to say that this is a serious ailment of a great many—*how* many I shall not attempt to estimate, but I believe the majority—of our present-day Fundamentalists. Bavinck says in his lecture on *Common Grace* that both the Baptists and the Methodists in America, due to the influence of Anabaptism, deny or ignore this doctrine. Surely they are very strong numerically in the Fundamentalist camp. Disregard of common grace goes a long way toward explaining the deplorable fact that our American Protestant clergy is on the whole so poorly educated. I regard the Methodist ban on

smoking and drinking as a flouting of at least a few of the things of common grace. And may I not recall in this connection that Dr. I. M. Haldeman, one of our foremost American Fundamentalists, once published a sermon in which he discussed the growing demand in our day for civic righteousness under the title: *The Devil's Righteousness*?

Turning now to our subject proper, I wish to direct attention from some six viewpoints to the exceeding importance of the doctrine of common grace for the church of today.

(1) The churches of our day are passing through a doctrinal crisis. Many of the old creeds have fallen into disrepute. Few, if any, to be sure, have been officially scratched; but almost all of them are largely being ignored. It is generally known that even Presbyterian pulpits are occupied by men who reject certain articles of the Apostles' Creed, to say nothing of the Westminster Confession. Leaders in the church assure us that it makes precious little difference what one believes or disbelieves, so long as one lives the so-called Christ-life. "No creed but Christ" is the slogan not merely of certain rescue missions, but of a very large part of American Christendom.

This cannot go on forever. A creedless church cannot long exist. A reaction is pretty certain to set in. Sooner or later, I expect, the church will come to feel that it has to give an account of what it believes.

When that comes to pass, the fundamental question confronting the church will be this: who is God? That question is always fundamental. The church's theology in the broad sense of the term has ever been determined by its theology in the narrow sense. One's view of God ultimately determines one's view of man, of the universe, of the way of salvation, of everything.

Now the doctrine of common grace has a most direct and important bearing on the question who God is. On the one hand it tells us that God is good to all men. If common grace means anything at all, it means that. But on the other hand common grace implies the existence also of special or particular grace. And so it is an implication of this doctrine that God is not good to all men in the same sense; that he does not manifest his goodness to all unto salvation.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to predict to what erroneous conception of God the church may come, nay, eventually *must* come, if it discards the doctrine of common grace. Either it will deny that God is good to all men, and then it will be driven to the conclusion that God showers blessings of various kinds upon those whom he does not love with no other intention than that these blessings shall become a curse for them; or the church will assert that God is good to all men in precisely the same manner, and thus it will deny that some are saved by special grace while others perish through lack of it. This will amount to a denial of divine sover-

eighty. In a word, if the church denies common grace, it will one day find itself in possession of a God who is either a despot or a weakling.

The doctrine of common grace, however, if consistently held to, is a sure safeguard against both of these calamities. It makes for a sound view of God, which, as was already remarked, is basic to all sound theology.

(2) If I am not mistaken, present-day theology is in the sign of man. Anthropology is the subject of chief interest. And the burning question is: just how good or how bad is man?

The doctrine of common grace gives a definite answer to that question. It tells us that natural, unregenerated, man is totally depraved and consequently incapable of doing any good whatsoever of himself. Undeniable fact is, however, that he does a great deal of good. Just think of the civic virtues and the noble morality which often adorn him. This good, says our doctrine, is the fruit of the working of God's common grace in him.

But now observe to what erroneous views of man the denial of common grace must needs lead. If we discard common grace, we are driven inevitably to one of two conclusions: either man is not totally depraved, he can do good of himself; or the good which he does is not really good at all: his virtues are faults; his noble accomplishments are works of the devil; his patriotism, marital fidelity, filial piety, love for his children, common honesty are all of them

glittering sins. In the doctrine of man the denial of common grace leads to rankest Modernism or blackest misanthropy.

If the church would escape being perched on either horn of this dilemma, it must cling tooth and nail to the truth of common grace.

(3) The higher critics, so-called, have for many decades been attempting to prove that the religion of Israel was of a kind with the other religions of the ancient world as, for example, the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Assyrian. At that very point the Old Testament critics have all the time been driving. And, naturally, in their argumentation they were everlastingly calling attention to common elements in Israel's religion on the one hand and ancient paganism on the other.

Of course I agree wholeheartedly with all those believing scholars who contend that the religion of Israel was essentially different, positively unique, in a class entirely by itself. The essence of Israel's religion lay in the covenant of grace, which God had established with no other people on the face of the earth. Let me put it this way: in other religions it was man that sought God; in this unique religion it was God that sought man. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation."

I am afraid, however, that some well-meaning Christian teachers and students, in their debate with

the critics, have been overshooting the mark. That of course is poor policy.

I mean this: in their anxiety to prove the uniqueness of Israel's religion, they have been too ready to deny obvious resemblances between it and other religions. In other words—and now we hitch up with our subject—they have too largely ignored the plain fact that God in the establishment of the covenant of special grace took his starting point in common grace. Israel's religion was built up on the broad foundation of the original religion of humanity in the families of Adam and Noah, in the races of Seth and Shem. Therefore those attributes of God which are revealed in nature, as his omnipotence and omniscience, are more prominent on the pages of the Old Testament than in the New. That also explains it that God adopted for the religion of his chosen race some forms already in existence elsewhere, as the rite of circumcision, for instance. Thus Bavinck reasons in his lecture on our subject.

The point is this. Israel's religion was absolutely unique. That truth should receive all emphasis. But it may not be forgotten that common grace underlay it. To remember this will strengthen us in our warfare with the critics.

(4) We come to a point of great practical significance.

Our age has been styled "the missionary age." I think correctly so. Not since the days of the apostle Paul has the Christian church been laboring so dili-

gently for the extension of the kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel as it is today. But I contend that neglect of the truth of common grace can hardly help resulting in the lagging of this activity. On the other hand, its full recognition must needs be a boon to this great enterprise.

It has already been remarked that in the old dispensation God took his starting point in common grace. Israel's religion was built historically on the foundation of the general religion of humanity. However, as time went on the general was relegated to the background, and the particular, that is, the covenant of special grace in the promised Messiah, was pressed into the foreground. Then, in the fullness of time, the Christ appeared and in him the fullness of special grace was revealed. But lo and behold! Something remarkable now happened. Special grace was not restricted to Israel; it was imparted to the world. In the new dispensation the stream of special grace overflowed the bounds of Israel's nationality and rushed out over the whole world of humanity. Now for this occasion God had preserved the race by his common grace. And so it is characteristic of the new dispensation that in it common grace and special grace, long separated, again flow together. But that is only another way of saying that the new dispensation is the dispensation of missions.

How inseparably then are not the doctrine of common grace and the doctrine of missions bound up together!

Everybody will have to admit that the very first requirement for successful missionary effort is a point of contact between the missionary and those whom he would lead to Christ.

The missionary who recognizes this has a wonderful advantage over his colleague who fails to see it. God himself has supplied this point of contact in common grace. To illustrate the point I need but quote from the famous address made by the church's greatest missionary on Mars' Hill in the city of Athens. How adroitly the apostle took common grace as his starting point in preaching the Christ! "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are more than others respectful of what is divine. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown God.' Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him I declare unto you." And he went on: "This God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the time before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being, as certain also of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.'"

It has been said by certain consistent deniers of common grace that, since God is not good in any sense to the reprobate, it cannot be his desire that

they should accept the Gospel offer. It is difficult to see how anyone with this view can be very enthusiastic about preaching the Gospel to a lost world. How very different is the case of the preacher who is convinced that God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"!

(5) Ours is the age of social welfare work, temperance movements, reform societies. Seldom, if ever, has there been such an insistent demand for civic righteousness as today.

It is not for us to determine at this point how far and after what manner the church is to co-operate with these movements. This must be asserted: the church should know of nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified. This may be added: the only way in which society can be saved is through the salvation of individuals. But I hasten to say that the church which ignores these movements is guilty before God of neglect.

Christ came into the world not merely to restore the ethical-religious life of man. No, the influence of the Christ is co-extensive with sin. He came to restore all that had been corrupted and disrupted by sin. His mission was to destroy all the works of the devil. For that reason Christ has something to say about the family, society, industry, even science and art. And it is the church's business to interpret this all-inclusive message of the Christ to the world.

But only then can the church be expected to perform this task if first it has grasped the doctrine of common grace. For the several spheres just named are all included in the larger sphere of common grace. If the church denies our doctrine, there is great danger that it will content itself with leading individual souls to heaven, and let society alone, trusting, as a leading Baptist preacher once put it, that "God will save society when his King comes back."

(6) My sixth point was already treated in the chapter on Modernism and Fundamentalism. Now I shall merely summarize.

The Modernist commits the terrible sin of reducing the supernatural to the level of the natural and thus destroying it. The Fundamentalist stresses the supernatural at the expense of the natural. That too is a mistake. The Calvinist, while upholding the supernatural with all his might, also gives due honor to the natural. Therefore Calvinism, not Fundamentalism, is the cure for Modernism. So we argued.

And now it must be added that the credit for Calvinism's just appraisal of the natural belongs to the Reformed doctrine of common grace. It enables us to esteem the natural as God would have it esteemed. It insists that natural blessings as rain and sunshine in due season, natural talents as music and oratory, natural virtues as filial piety and mar-

ital love are all of them good gifts that come down from the Father of lights. At every turn the doctrine of common grace exalts the natural.

So this truth keeps the Calvinist from the weakness of Fundamentalism, and at once arms him for the conflict with Modernism.

Pre-, Post-, and A-Millennialism

CHAPTER IX.

PRE-, POST-, AND A-MILLENNIALISM

SO MUCH has been written and spoken in late years about Pre- and Post-millennialism that it seems almost superfluous to define them. A few general statements ought to suffice.

Many Christians believe that the kingdom of God is going to have universal sway over the earth before the end of time, and that righteousness and peace and the knowledge of the Lord will everywhere prevail. This happy period is commonly called the Millennium, or Christ's reign of a thousand years.

The Premillenarian believes that Christ's second advent will occur before the Millennium. Pre- means before. He expects the world to go from bad to worse until presently the Christ puts in his appearance in order to put down his foes and to reign on earth with the translated and the resurrected saints.

The Postmillenarian feels sure that, through the preaching of the Gospel and the general uplifting influence of Christianity, the Millennium will gradually be ushered in. It follows that it will not be necessary for Christ to return to earth until after this blessed period. Post- means after.

The great majority of those present-day Christians who give serious thought to the future choose be-

tween Pre- and Post-. They feel this incumbent upon them. It never seems to occur to them that their choice is not limited to these two views. As a matter of fact there is a third view. It differs about as much from Post- as from Pre-millennialism. It has been called, very correctly it seems to me, Amillennialism.

The Amillenarian is convinced that there is not going to be a period of universal peace and righteousness on earth this side of eternity. He rejects the teaching of a future millennium. A- means not.

Premillennialism savors strongly of Judaism. Every student of the Bible knows that the big trouble with the Jews of Jesus' day, including even the chosen twelve, was that they expected the Messiah to break in pieces like a potter's vessel the oppressors of the Lord's heritage, to sit upon the throne of his illustrious sire David at Jerusalem, and from there to extend his dominion to earth's utmost ends. They looked for an earthly, physical, kingdom of Messiah rather than a heavenly and spiritual.

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century lived in much the same hope. This may seem very strange in view of their tendency, referred to in the discussion of *Modernism and Fundamentalism*, to exalt the spiritual at the expense of the natural. But it is not nearly so strange as it looks. When people show an inclination to become overly spiritual, it is usually safe to infer that they are not so very spiritual after

all. Truly spiritual men and women do not pose as such.

Far be it from me to call the Premillenarian names! I am not hurling any epithet at him: neither that of Judaizer nor that of Anabaptist. But, as was already said that his view savors of Judaism, so now I add that it suggests Anabaptism. It is a matter of history that our modern Baptists, among whom are many very staunch Premillenarians, are the lineal descendants, not of the fanatical, but of the more sober kind of Anabaptists of the Reformation age.

The Postmillenarian has this in common with the Modernist that he looks for the world to become better and better. This statement is not intended as a slur. But fact it is. Nor can it be denied that, while some Postmillenarians are hotly opposed to Modernism, a great many of them are rapidly drifting toward the Modernist whirl-pool. Not a few are strongly inclined to deny Christ's visible return altogether. They spiritualize this Scriptural doctrine.

The great Reformed Confessions are Amillenarian. By this is not meant that they condemn in so many words either Pre- or Post-millennialism as heretical. But, to say the very least, they do not teach a millennium. Is it too bold to assert that by implication they deny that there is going to be a time of universal peace?

Many members of the Reformed Church in America misunderstand the attitude of the Christian Re-

formed Church toward the millennial question. From the deposition of the Reverend Harry Bultema of Muskegon they have inferred that the Christian Reformed Church has put up the bars against all Premillenarians. This is not at all the case. Bultema was deposed, not because of his Premillenarian views as such, but on the ground of his denial of two important points of doctrine, both clearly taught in the church Standards: the unity of the church of the old and the new dispensations, and the Kingship of Christ over his church. There are a number of Premillenarians in the Christian Reformed fellowship today, some of them very highly respected. And did not the Synod of Orange City, 1922, turn down an overture requesting that the denomination take a definite stand on the millennial issue?

There are some Premillenarians in the Christian Reformed Church. There are many more in the Reformed Church.

To my knowledge there are no Postmillenarians in the Christian Reformed Church. There are several in the Reformed Church.

Almost all the members, including the ministers, of the Christian Reformed Church lean toward Amillennialism. So strong a statement cannot be made about the Reformed Church in America.

Christians ought to be very careful about saying definitely that they are Pre-, or Post-, or A-millenarians. Few know enough about the matter to take an intelligent stand. Our best Reformed theologians

cannot be said to have made an exhaustive study of the teaching of the Word of God on the subject. Much hard work remains to be done in this department. And it goes without saying that the issue will have to be threshed out on Scriptural ground.

May I be pardoned for the temerity of suggesting two little contributions, not altogether original either, toward the Scriptural study of this interesting subject?

There is a group of passages in the Bible which teach that toward Christ's second coming the world is going to be a very wicked place. The Premillenarians make much of these passages; the Postmillenarians rather ignore them. I quote just a few. Jesus compared the days immediately preceding the advent of the Son of man with those of Lot in Sodom.—Luke 17:26-29. At the conclusion of the parable of the widow and the unrighteous judge the Savior sighed the melancholy query: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"—Luke 18:8. Revelation 13 pictures the terrible reign of Antichrist, after whom *all the world* is said to wonder. It is not strange that many earnest students of Scripture have come to the conclusion that the world must grow worse and worse as time goes on, until at last it shall be desperately wicked.

But the Bible contains another group of passages, teaching the gradual development of Christ's kingdom on earth. From these many infer that the world must needs become better and better, until the

process of development issues in the Millennium. The Postmillenarians make much of these passages; the Premillenarians are inclined to explain them away. Again I refer to but a few. Daniel spoke of Messiah's kingdom as a stone cut out without hands, which grew into a great mountain and filled the earth.—2:35, 44, 45. And Jesus taught much the same truth in the very well known parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.—Matthew 13: 31-33.

Now it seems to me that only the Amillenarians can do justice to these two seemingly contradictory teachings of God's Word. Fact is that there are two kingdoms on earth: one of Light, the other of Darkness. Both are in process of development. Of both it may be said what Charles Hodge writes guardedly of the former: each is, "in some of its aspects, progressive."—*Systematic Theology*, Volume III, page 850. Broadly speaking, conditions on earth are becoming both better and worse at once. Witness: the Christianization of pagan nations and the slipping back of Christian peoples into paganism.

Meanwhile the two kingdoms are engaged in mortal combat. They would thwart one another's development. In the struggle sometimes the one seems to get the better of the other, then again the other of the one. If I read the Word correctly, a time is coming when the kingdom of Darkness will seem to have triumphed almost completely over that of Light. But this will last but a little season. With

the suddenness of a flash of lightning the King of kings and Lord of lords will appear in great glory and power and turn seeming defeat into perfect victory.

And then the angel who stands with his right foot on the sea, his left on the earth, will swear by him that liveth for ever and ever that there shall be time no longer.

The Premillenarians make a great deal of Revelation 20:1-10. This passage is the chief supporting pillar of the Premillennial structure.

I wish to suggest an Amillenarian explanation. Dr. B. B. Warfield of Princeton Seminary first taught me it some fifteen years ago. Since then I have come across it a few times. It looks very reasonable to me.

Mention is made of a reign of Christ lasting a thousand years. Like the numbers in Revelation generally, also this one is symbolic. It designates a long and complete period of history. It is the period from Christ's ascension into heaven until his return; in a word, the new, the present, dispensation. He is reigning now.

During this period Satan is said to be bound. It may seem foolish to assert that this is the case today. But we are not told that he is bound absolutely. Only so far is he bound "that he should deceive the nations no more." And when he is loosed at the end of the thousand years, he will deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and

Magog, to gather them for battle against the saints. The meaning is simply this: as in the old dispensation the pagan nations were supreme, so in the new the Christian nations will hold sway on earth. Does not history support this interpretation? Not until the very end of this period will Satan be permitted to lead the pagan forces from the ends of the earth against Christendom.

We are not told that the saints will reign *bodily* with Christ during the thousand years. To the contrary, we are expressly informed that the "*souls*" of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus lived and reigned with Christ. That is the case right now. And this is called the first resurrection.

Satan will be loosed but a little while. His forces will make it hot for the saints. But God will send fire from heaven and devour his enemies. And then at once comes the general judgment.

In conclusion may I not sound a note of warning against two extremes?

There are those who are decidedly fanatic about Christ's second coming. They think of little else. Like the Thessalonians of Paul's day they are so deeply absorbed in its consideration that they neglect their present duties. They want it spoken of in every sermon. They think to find reference to it in almost every verse of Scripture. Such should be admonished to be sober.

There are also those in Reformed circles who discourage and even disparage all study of future

events. That is decidedly unbiblical. The New Testament is replete with exhortations to observe the signs of the times, to regard the word of prophecy, to look forward to the glorious coming of the Lord. Does it not end with an announcement of this stupendous event and a fervent prayer for its hastening? The consideration of Christ's coming should put a stamp on the life of every Christian, a stamp of holiness. "Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless!"

The Christian and the World

CHAPTER X.

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD

THREE considerations constrain me to say something about the Christian's relation to the world.

One of the most urgent problems confronting the Christian church in general, the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches in particular, is how to combat the rapidly increasing worldliness of church-members. The problem is exceedingly acute just now in Christian Reformed circles for the obvious reason that our people are stepping forth from virtual isolation into closer contact with the world.

In the second place, while the attitude of Reformed Christians toward the world has much in common with that of Christians of other persuasions, in some respects the Reformed view is distinctive. For instance, some Christians are ascetic; the Calvinist is not. But we shall have more to say on this subject.

Finally, I greatly fear that there is prevalent in our Reformed circles a very superficial view of worldliness. I verily believe that there are those among us who vehemently denounce certain obvious forms of worldliness, and, without ever suspecting it, are themselves guilty of other forms, less obvious but just as serious.

Having stated why I write on this subject, let me now bring what I have to say under five heads.

1. The Christian Strives to Keep Himself Unspotted from the World.

That the Christian should abstain from practices in themselves sinful, is so evident that the very mention of it seems superfluous.

But at once the question arises: what practices are as such sinful? Many think this question a difficult one; as a matter of fact the answer is simple. Not so very many things are sinful in themselves. Many Christians call dancing a sin. Now, to be sure, it is exceedingly difficult to conceive of a person's engaging in the usual modern dance without sinning. Yet according to the Bible dancing as such is not a sin. David danced before the ark. In Psalms 149 and 150 men are told to praise God in the dance. Again, several Christians are positive that it is wrong to use an alcoholic drink as a beverage. And who can deny that such drinking leads to much sinning? But the Bible tells us that God gives men wine to gladden their hearts, and his Son made wine at the wedding in Cana.

A pretty complete list of practices wrong in themselves has come to us in the Ten Commandments.

However, let no one suppose that all the Christian has to do in order to keep himself unspotted from the world, is to abstain from things in themselves sinful. The case is not nearly as simple as

that. Often he must refrain from practices in themselves innocent.

Did not the Savior tell us to cut off a hand or a foot, a right one at that, and to pluck out an eye, if these offend us, since it is better to enter into life maimed or halt or partially blind than to be cast whole into hell-fire? Now surely hands and feet and eyes are in themselves valuable assets. But somehow assets may be turned into liabilities. That occurs when they become offenses, stumbling-blocks, occasions for sinning. We have the Savior's command then, radically, abruptly, to break with things which, though good enough in themselves, lead us inevitably to sinning.

Let us apply this advice to our modern life.

A Christian young woman has histrionic talent, let us say. Now according to the best Reformed moralists that is a gift of God's common grace. There is nothing reprehensible about dramatic representation as such. In order to develop her talent, she attends a school of dramatic art. She graduates and is now a professional actress. But soon she finds, as, it seems to me, she can hardly help finding in today's theatrical world, that her work and her associations are inevitably dulling her moral sensibility. The time has come for her to drop her career.

The cinema is a wonderful invention, and not of the devil either, as some would have us believe. But the modern moving picture show, generally speak-

ing, is admittedly so thoroughly corrupt and corrupting that Christians may well taboo it.

Dancing in the Biblical sense is perfectly proper. Dancing in the modern sense is very demoralizing. That they may avoid its lure, I do not want my children to learn to dance at all.

May I not add here that it is the Christian's duty, not only to avoid stumbling himself, but also to keep others from it? Did not Paul say that, rather than offend his brother; that is, rather than give his brother occasion for falling into sin, he would never eat meat? Let us beware lest on our account the weak brother, for whom Christ died, perish.—I Corinthians 8:11.

2. The Christian Feels Himself a Stranger in the World.

The Bible teaches this repeatedly and emphatically. When Jesus complained: "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," he was not referring to his supposed poverty—he was not as poor as is commonly thought—but to his restlessness. He did not feel at home on earth. How could he? His home was heaven. And much the same thing is true of his disciples. Of Abraham we are told that "he sought the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That applies also to his children. "Our citizenship is in heaven." Now we, like the Israelites of old, are journeying through a desert. Presently we shall enter upon the rest of

Canaan. "There remaineth therefore a rest unto the people of God."

With that in mind, Jesus warned us not to gather a treasure on earth, where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but to make sure that we have a treasure in heaven, where such things do not happen; and Paul exhorted us to seek the things which are above instead of setting our affections on earthly things. And again the same apostle told us that, while we may indeed use the world, we should take heed lest we *abuse* it; that is, *use it too intensely*.—I Corinthians 7:31.

Let us suggestively apply also this last admonition to modern living.

A Christian young man was studying medicine at one of our big universities. He had a consuming passion for his work. One day he made the alarming discovery that his devotion to things physical had caused his interest in the spiritual to wane almost to nil. He determined to regain his balance. But, try as he might over a period of several months, he failed. Leaving others alone, he concluded that for himself the study of medicine was a stumbling-block. He dropped medicine and, instead, turned to theology.

I know several sincere Christians, some of them Christian Reformed ministers, who see no harm at all in an occasional game of cards such as Rook. They fail to feel the force of the familiar argument that he who plays a game in which the element of

chance is prominent, is playing with divine Providence and thus committing sacrilege. But, obviously, as soon as one acquires a passion for such games, which, it would seem, happens quite readily, one has overstepped bounds. In that case, the sooner one's cards are assigned to the furnace, the better.

Money is a splendid gift of God. But very few are they who can resist the temptations of riches. And so my advice to almost all Christians is to keep giving away so much that they never become wealthy. And my opinion of the miserly elder is that he is every whit as worldly as the young people whom he threatens with excommunication if they do not desist from dancing and theatre-going. The minister too who preaches for money rather than for the love of God and human souls is in the same class. In fact every one who has not learned to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, trusting that all other things will be added unto him, is essentially worldly.

3. The Christian Should Use Whatever is Usable in the World Unto God's Glory.

Many Christians, in their fervent desire to avoid the world's contamination, adopt a policy of "touch not, taste not, and handle not." This policy is usually called Anabaptistic, but it is followed to some extent by several Christians who bitterly resent being called by this name.

That the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages is sinful, is a rather prevalent view. I have actually

heard the opinion expressed in all seriousness that the moving picture must be an invention of Satan, and that he who allows his eyes to rest on one, whether in the theatre or in the church, has fellowship with the works of darkness. I know several persons who pride themselves on not having seen the inside of a theatre on any occasion whatever. When a member of one of my charges placed a billiard table in the attic of his home, some of his Christian neighbors shrugged their shoulders.

It does not occur to me to question the good intentions of such little people, but I do feel that they greatly need to be warned. While they think that they are playing safe, in reality they are treading on very dangerous ground. Let them beware lest, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they become whited sepulchres. Let them remember that many a monastery and convent has degenerated into a brothel. Let them read about the scandalous parade which the Dutch Anabaptists once staged on the streets of Amsterdam. To be overly pious is not a virtue, but an abomination. "To touch not, to taste not, to handle not" is next to worldliness of the most blatant type. Extremes meet.

But that is not all. Not only is the Anabaptistic attitude toward the world fraught with the gravest kind of perils for man. What is even worse, it deprives God of honor which is due to him. In all his works and in all his gifts, those of common grace as well as of saving grace, God is aiming at

his own glory. It is for us to use them to that end. Far be it from us Christians to leave the fine arts, as music, sculpture, and drama; such inventions as the cinema and the radio; money, sports, etc., for Satan and the wicked world to exploit. We should capitalize them much more than we have been doing for the glorification of the great God, from whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things. "Pro Rege!" "For the King!"

In this connection should be considered the interesting fact that, while the Methodists have long had a ban on such things as theatre-going and dancing, as well as smoking and drinking, the Reformed churches, while just as earnest in their warnings against worldliness, have usually refrained from placing an official ban on such practices.

The following four considerations will, I believe, in large measure explain this phenomenon.

- a) No creature or gift of God is in itself evil.
- b) We are not living in the dispensation of the law, but in that of the Spirit.
- c) The only cure for sin is positive holiness.
- d) Instead of leaving the world alone altogether, the Christian should employ all that is usable to God's glorification.

And they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into the New Jerusalem.

4. It is the Christian's Duty to Testify Against the Sins of the World.

I greatly fear that the chief reason why we Christians and worldly people about us get along together so peaceably and pleasantly today, is to be found in our failure to testify against the world as we should.

Instead of crying out against wicked shows, we seem satisfied if we can keep our own children away. And seated comfortably in church, we allow the world to desecrate the Lord's day almost at will. The result is that the world pokes fun at us, but can hardly be said positively to hate us.

As priests we should keep ourselves pure from the world. As prophets we should declaim against the world. But history tells us that prophets rather than priests must bear the brunt of the world's persecution.

To be sure, the Christian should not be unnecessarily offensive. He should not go through life with a chip on his shoulder. So far as is in him he should keep peace with all men. But if he is faithful in testifying he is sure to make some enemies.

It is said that John Wesley used to ask two questions of candidates for the ministry, both of which they had to answer affirmatively in order to be admitted to this high calling. They were: "Have you made any converts?" and "Have you made any enemies?"

Said the Master: "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also

persecute you"; and "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Paul assured the Christians of his day "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." And the last of the eight beatitudes, in which are enumerated as many evidences of regeneration, each one of which is, therefore, descriptive of every Christian, reads: "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

We conclude that he who, in the interest of comfort or reputation, refrains from testifying against the world's sins, is himself guilty of the sin of worldliness. Only he who will deny himself, take up his cross, and follow the Master to death, can be his disciple.

5. The Christian Should Be a Blessing to the World.

The Pharisee of the parable thanked God that he was not like other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or like the publican who had just entered the temple to beg God for mercy. But he never moved a finger to lift up this poor sinner from the mire into which he had sunk.

Let not the Christian suppose that he has done his duty by the world if he succeeds in keeping himself

unspotted from it. Most emphatically, *No!* Like his Lord, he must seek to save that which is lost.

With profound gratitude to God it may be recorded that our Reformed people are rapidly coming to a fuller realization of this truth. For many decades already the Reformed Church in America has abounded in this work of the Lord. Its magnificent missionary zeal is its crown of glory. But also the Christian Reformed Church is increasingly active in the work of missions.

Yet who dares to say that the goal of perfection has been reached? In the city of Grand Rapids we have a flourishing rescue mission. There still are those in our circles who look down on this institution with rather proud disdain. Much more numerous are those who say charitably: "Let the mission carry on; it reaches a class of people which the churches cannot touch." But right here I would interpose a question. What manner of church is that which cannot touch the beastly drunkard and the leprous harlot? Do you call it Christian? But was not Christ the best friend that publicans and sinners ever had? In our city of two score Reformed churches hundreds still sigh: "No man careth for my soul."

When God called out Abraham from his pagan surroundings to make him the father of a peculiar people, he said: "And in thy seed shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed." There is a lesson here which we have not yet fully grasped. Israel's isola-

tion was not an end in itself. It served only as a means to an end. Israel had to dwell alone in order that it might become a blessing to all the world. Let no Christian isolate himself from the world and then say in smug complacency: "I am holier than thou." No true Christian can do that. It is of the very essence of Christianity to be a blessing.

Far be it from me to insinuate that there are among our Reformed people Cains who mutter: "Am I my brother's keeper?" or Jonahs who long to see our modern Ninevehs go up in smoke and grumble when the long-suffering God spares them. But all of us may well be reminded of the Savior's words: "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world."

Let us carry into the world, enveloped in the darkness of sin and death, the bright light of the Gospel of him who declared: "I am the Light of the world"!

Reformed Preaching

CHAPTER XI.

REFORMED PREACHING

I HAVE an idea that we of today may to advantage be reminded of certain things with reference to preaching which our Reformed fathers used to emphasize.

They may be grouped under four heads.

(1) About the Preacher

The very first question asked of a candidate for the ministry in our Reformed form of ordination is: whether he feels in his heart that he is called of God himself to the holy ministry. He is expected to reply: "Yes, truly, with all my heart."

That is fundamental.

This conviction alone will enable him to preach with the proper note of authority, to preface his declarations with the prophetic "Thus saith the Lord."

When this conviction becomes a fire burning in his bones, he will pour out his very soul in his preaching, as did the chief apostle in the words: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God!"

Swayed by this conviction, he will refrain from bringing his personal views into the pulpit and make sure that what he says is the very Word of God.

This conviction, safeguarding him against the fatal error of seeking to please men rather than God, will make of him a veritable hero who in reckless self-abandonment proclaims the full truth regardless of consequences.

Upheld by this conviction, he will in days of weakness boast: "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me"; and when assailed by temptations of satan, jibes of the world, and slanders of false brethren, exultingly say: "By thee have I run through a troop; by my God have I leaped over a wall."

Is it presumptuous for me to offer just a bit of advice to young men who may be contemplating the ministry as their life work? If you are not firmly convinced that God is calling you, stay out! And if you are not willing to suffer for Christ's sake, keep away! Better figure the cost before you start building the tower. There was wisdom in the second as well as the first of the questions, already quoted, which John Wesley used to ask of candidates for the ministry. The ministry is no place for touch-me-nots or Willie-boys.

Our Reformed fathers had the gift of combining a lot of hard-headed common sense with their religion. It takes common sense to determine whether one is called of God to the ministry. Supposed visions and voices from heaven are unreliable. The letters P. C. written in the sky may mean Plant Corn as well as Preach Christ. The conviction of a divine

calling should be rooted in something much more profound than the emotions. Perhaps twenty-five per cent of young men at the time of their conversion feel an urge to preach the Gospel. It is well. But what a blessing that the great majority of them never become ministers! It is self-evident that, if God wants a man to preach his Word, he will give him certain necessary qualifications. That God should call to the ministry a person who stutters or cannot think straight is, to put it mildly, unlikely. I am afraid that some men want to be ministers because they take themselves too seriously. He who cannot every once in a while have a good laugh on himself should be slow about concluding that God wants him to preach.

The Reformed churches have always insisted on an educated ministry. This has ever been a matter of principle with them. And never has the need of an educated ministry been greater than today. General education is much more common than even a generation ago. Almost everybody goes through high school. Our American colleges are being stampered by students. It follows that he who is to preach to the present and the coming generations must have received a broad liberal education as well as a scientific theological training.

In view of this principle and this situation, it is gratifying to note the rapid development of our Reformed colleges. We are waking up to the fact that our seminaries also greatly need strengthening. It

is time that we should. Medical and law courses today are much longer and much more exacting than they were a couple of decades ago. Our theological courses until quite recently were still very much the same. But we are moving in the right direction. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1926 deserves high praise for establishing a sixth chair at Calvin Seminary.

We need an educated ministry in order that we may get studied sermons. It is not at all difficult for a man who has preached a few years to shake a sermon out of his sleeve, but the faithful minister will not want to do this. Often an extemporaneous talk will receive more praise from the audience than a carefully prepared discourse, but the conscientious minister will not fall for it. "The gift of gab" is a wonderful asset if properly used, but, if relied upon in preaching, it becomes a ruinous liability. I have profound respect for those ministers who, under the stress of circumstances, preach three sermons a Sunday, but I fear it is suicidal in more than one way to continue this for a long time. To the query how many sermons a minister can make in a week, the celebrated Spurgeon is said to have replied: "That depends on the man. A very good minister should be able to make one, a mediocre minister two, an inferior minister three, and an unusually poor minister almost any number."

Above all else, the minister of the Gospel should be highly spiritual. He must have had a real and

rich religious experience. He must be genuinely pious. He must walk with God. It must be evident that he has been with Jesus. No, it cannot be denied that God is able to employ other men as instruments unto good. There is truth in the homely saying that God can strike a straight blow with a crooked stick. However, only the spiritual man can discern spiritual things, perform the spiritual work of the ministry lovingly, preach spiritual sermons with a burning heart, and confirm his preaching by spiritual living. The minister who lacks spirituality is pretty sure to degenerate into a sluggard or a mercenary.

Spirituality always goes hand in hand with humility. Humility is an absolute requisite in a minister. The self-seeking minister is in great need of conversion. The usual New Testament word for preacher is "herald." The herald's work is not to announce himself, but his King, who is coming. When John the Baptist was asked who he was, he replied: "I am a Voice." He wanted to be heard, not seen. I can think of no better inaugural text than this one: "He must increase, I must decrease." And when a minister has finished his farewell sermon, it should be true of the congregation what is told of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration after the departure of Moses and Elias: "When they lifted up their eyes, they saw no man save Jesus only."

(2) About the Audience

In their letters the apostles addressed themselves to believers. The minister of an organized church

should do likewise. It is a big mistake for him to place his audience on a level with that which faces the foreign missionary or that which is found at rescue missions. His audience is a manifestation of the body of Christ, which he should seek to perfect.

The children in the audience he should regard as covenant children. This means that he has a right to assume that they are regenerated. But that very assumption gives force to his appeal that they accept the Christ by an act of personal and conscious faith as Savior and Lord. They should be warned that, if they fail to do this, they will be cast out into outer darkness.

Personally I see no sense in preaching special sermons or even sermonettes for the children. Every sermon should contain a great deal to interest the little ones. The minister who finds it difficult to come down to the intellectual level of children should study harder. It requires less study to preach for adults than for children. And be it said for the preacher's encouragement: when the children can understand his sermons, the chances are that even the grown-ups will be able to follow.

I fear that not a few preachers underestimate their audiences. The shallowness of many a sermon constitutes a veritable insult to those who are expected to listen. I feel sure that one reason why some ministers fail to keep their audiences is that they have little but platitudes to offer. The great majority of people like to have their minister pro-

duce new treasures as well as old from the Word. They want more than they can say they want. In his autobiography Edward Bok ascribes the marvelous success of *The Ladies' Home Journal* in part to the fact that it always gave its readers a little more and something a little different than what they asked for. I once heard Dr. Warfield say to a class: "Gentlemen, I hope you all will preach over the heads of your audiences. Paul did."

But woe be to the preacher who expresses simple truths, or even deep truths, in a dense way in order to harvest the compliment that he is deep. The art of preaching consists largely of expressing deep thoughts in the most simple language. Of that art Jesus was master.

The average audience is pretty sure to contain some hypocrites. In the circle of the twelve was Judas. The Pentecostal church contained Ananias and Sapphira. It is the preacher's business, once in a while to hit the hypocrites, without being personal of course; to hit hypocrisy, let me say, and to hit it hard. To do so will likely cause trouble; it may even prove equivalent to stirring up a hornets' nest. But what of it? He who is afraid of a sting or two is unworthy of the ministry.

Sometimes it becomes the minister's duty to tell his audience things which, he knows beforehand, they will not like. It requires no courage at all to denounce Modernism and Masonry before a Christian Reformed audience. A coward can do that. But to

strike the lancet, be it in the spirit of love, into a congregational sore is quite a different matter.

It is safe to assume that almost any audience contains a number of unconverted persons. They should be told to repent of their sins and to accept God's sincere offer of free salvation in the Christ. This is sometimes called the evangelical note. I think that something of it should be heard in every sermon. If it is, I doubt the need of special evangelistic services.

(3) *About the Content of Sermons*

"Preach the Word!" That was Paul's charge to Timothy. It is also God's charge to every preacher.

This rules out book reviews, rehashes of magazine articles, and those topical sermons in which the text serves the same purpose as the diving-board at a swimming-pool. I recall a striking sermon of this type. The preacher announced as his text part of Psalm 91:6: "the destruction that wasteth at noon-day," and then proceeded to moralize on *The Perils of Middle Age*. The text was a mere take-off.

It is often said that, since it is the minister's business to preach the Word, he must leave timely topics and problems of the day severely alone. But that is a mistake. It evidently results from undervaluation of the Word. The Bible is the book of every age. When God inspired holy men to write it, he had in mind the contingencies that would arise in succeeding centuries to the very end of time. Thus it has come about that in principle the Bible contains the solution of every problem with a religious or moral

import. How marvelous a book! To illustrate, the Bible does not say how many hours a day a laborer should work, whether eight or nine or less. But it does offer in principle the solution of the problem of the relation of employers and employees. According to Ephesians 6:5-9 it consists of this: that both acknowledge Christ as Master. Similarly Isaiah 11:9 tells us that the one solution of the problem of war is the knowledge of the Lord. Universal peace will be established when the earth is "full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." To put it more generally, at the root of our problems lies sin. But the cross of Jesus Christ means the destruction of sin. And so the cross offers the ultimate solution of all our problems.

Then let not the minister who begins his labors with the apostolic statement that he has determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified, be content with telling men merely how they may get to heaven. If he would do justice to the crucified Christ, he will have to get down to business and work out a tremendous program.

However, let the preacher beware of the pitfalls of the so-called social gospel. As he deals with the problems of society, let him not forget that primarily he has to do with individuals. The only way in which society can be saved is through the salvation of the individuals constituting it. The minister must lead individual sinners to the foot of the cross. Nor may he be one-sidedly this-worldly in his preaching.

Yes, this life too is important. But soon it will be ended. Death is approaching. Right now there is but a step between us and it. Then comes eternity. Where will we spend it? Will we pass through the pearly gates into the golden city? Or will we be assigned to the fire unquenchable? Those are stupendously serious questions.

How very close is the relation of the printed Word to the personal Word! The whole Bible is about the Christ. The gist of the Old Testament is that he is coming. The New Testament may be summed up in the simple statements that he has come and that he is coming again. Reformed preaching should be Theocentric. It should at once be Christocentric. Its central theme is God in Christ.

I want to go on record as strongly favoring doctrinal preaching in general, preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism in particular.

For two years I served a Reformed church which had had some of the very ablest preachers in the denomination as its ministers. They did preach doctrine, no doubt very ably, but they did not preach catechismal sermons nearly every Sunday. The doctrinal knowledge of the members of this church was considerably below the level of the average congregation which has listened to catechismal preaching practically every Sunday over a period of years.

Experience has taught me the wisdom of the rule of preaching a catechismal sermon each Sunday. If it is not adhered to, I doubt whether the rising gen-

eration will continue Reformed. The specific doctrines of our Reformed faith will be lost out of sight and consequently our young people will be scattered through other denominations. Our members will be swept off their feet by the numerous winds of error that blow. I greatly fear that many will fall victims to the fatal error of Modernism. If ever there was a time when regular catechismal preaching might be called an absolute necessity, that time is now.

May I add that a mere exposition of doctrine is not a sermon? All preaching should be practical. If doctrinal preaching is not at once ethical, it may even become dangerous. In the long run it will create the impression that orthodoxy is Christianity, which it is not. It is false to say that Christianity is not a doctrine, but a life. But it should never be forgotten that Christianity is a life as well as a doctrine.

(4) About the Manner of Preaching

If only the minister makes sure that he is preaching the Word, the method employed in constructing a sermon does not matter a great deal. There are several good methods. Will the reader pardon a brief personal reference? I shall never forget the advice given me by my father, a preacher of rich experience, when I was writing my first sermon. Said he: "Be careful not to adopt a fixed method of sermonizing; keep varying your method."

I would suggest that we have more expository preaching. It is well to take a rather large portion

of Scripture, perhaps a whole chapter, as text, and simply tell the audience what it means.

Unity is essential in every sermon. To murder a text by cutting it up is a crime. When the preacher is through, the one big central message of the text should be evident to all.

Much of our preaching is entirely too dry. It is no wonder at all that our audiences are often bored. It is almost invariably the preacher's fault if people fall asleep in church. Sermons should scintillate with interesting passages.

There is something radically wrong with the spiritless preacher. If any message deserves to be brought in a spirited way, it is the minister's. It should be evident to the audience that the preacher's soul is stirred by the Holy Spirit.

A sermon is a work of art. Its language should be choice as well as simple. The preacher should show his audience apples of gold in pictures of silver.

The delivery should be natural, not pretentious. Who can imagine Jesus using a "preektoon"? And let no preacher substitute excellency of speech for the excellency of power, which is of God.

Christian Education

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

IN consonance with their doctrine of the covenant, Reformed Christians have usually stressed strongly the necessity of Christian education.

That it is the paramount duty of Christian parents to bring up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, is indisputable. In our Reformed churches parents, on holding their children to baptism, solemnly promise to discharge this duty to the utmost of their ability.

Alas, how negligent many so-called Christian parents are in this regard! There are those who feel satisfied if they read from one to three chapters of the Bible a day without comment in the presence of their children. There are many who shift the burden of responsibility for the religious education of their children to the minister, the Sunday school teacher, and perhaps the teacher in the Christian day school. There are not a few who spend the time which should be devoted to leading their children to Jesus, in the pursuit of worldly pleasures. That is unspeakably sinful.

Every Christian father should firmly declare with Joshua of old: "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord," and then proceed to carry out the

admonition: "Thou shalt teach these words diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." The neglected family altar must be restored.

The question is often asked with great alarm: "What ails the young people of today?" I would reply with the question: "What ails their parents?" In many cases parents are to blame for it that children are going to hell.

That the church has a duty with reference to the religious education of the youth of the covenant is self-evident. Our Reformed churches are wont to take care of this matter in three ways besides preaching. They are catechism classes, Sunday schools, and societies of the young people.

The primary purpose of catechetical instruction is indoctrination. In this day of sects and heresies and indifference about doctrine, it should be attended to with utmost diligence. A Reformed church which neglects it is pretty sure to lose its hold on the young people. Its doctrinal distinctiveness too is in imminent peril. And so it is cause for rejoicing that Christian Reformed Synods have taken steps to strengthen this work, and that much emphasis is placed on it by the professor of Practical Theology

at the Western Seminary of the Reformed Church.

My opinion of the Sunday school will strike many as ridiculously old-fashioned. I would shift it from the church to the home. I firmly believe that every home with children should be a Sunday school, every parent a Sunday school teacher. If this were the case, and all our children attended catechism classes and the Christian school besides, as they ought, there would be no need of church Sunday schools for the children of the covenant. And then the Sunday school could revert to the purpose for which Robert Raikes founded it: to give religious education to children whose spiritual welfare is being neglected. The advantages of this system seem to me to be apparent. It would compel parents to study the Bible. It would present to parents a beautiful opportunity to do their religious duty by their children in a systematic way. And it would make the Sunday school a much more effective evangelization agent than it is today.

If it be objected that I am idealizing, that as a matter of fact the Sunday school is needed by the covenant youth because parents are neglecting the religious training of their children, catechism classes are not held in honor as they should be, and not nearly all the children of the church attend the Christian school, then I grant readily that there is much truth in this contention. Therefore I would not suggest an abrupt change in the Sunday school. I would even favor making the most of it as it is. But I see no good reason why we should not steer in the direc-

tion which I indicated and several why we should. It is my frank opinion that the present constitution of the Sunday school is the result of sinful neglect of the doctrine of the covenant. Because parents neglected their covenant duty by their children and the church failed to stress the distinction between the children of the covenant and those not of it, the Sunday school has become what it is today. Its character would be changed radically by a revival of the covenant idea. And for that we should pray and work.

About our societies for the young people of the church I want to say just one thing. The emphasis should fall on the study of the Bible and its application to present-day life. These societies should never be allowed to degenerate into athletic clubs, for instance. I do not even think it wise to call the sessions prayer-meetings. To be sure, it is well, even necessary, that our young people be exercised in public prayer. But to devote more time to prayer than to Bible study is pretty sure to foster unhealthy mysticism.

We come now to a subject on which there is considerable divergence of opinion between the Christian Reformed Church as a whole on the one hand, and the bulk of the membership of the Reformed Church in America on the other. It concerns the relation of the day school to religious education.

I have often heard it said by Christian Reformed people that the great majority of the members of

the Reformed Church are opposed to Christian instruction. But that is slander, unintentional most likely, not malicious, yet slander. It is not true that the Reformed Church folk do not favor Christian education, while those of the Christian Reformed Church do. Both favor it. But there is a decided difference of opinion between them as to the method by which it should be secured. The latter insist on free Christian schools; the former desire in some sense to Christianize the public school.

And now we stand face to face with what is not merely a petty squabble between two little denominations, but what may well be called the greatest and most urgent problem confronting the American people as a whole. For some years much has been said and written about the religious education of young America. Today the whole nation is deeply interested in the subject. The burning question of the day is: how are our children going to get the necessary religious education?

I am going to tabulate a number of conclusions on which many, perhaps the majority, of leading American educators have by this time come to agreement.

(1) The fact that practically no religious instruction has for some time been given in the public schools will account in large measure for the gross ignorance of religion which is prevalent among our young people.

The president of one of our universities recently had the boldness to call the public schools "pagan."

(2) The one sure foundation of morality is religion. The only way to check effectively the lawlessness which is found among young people is by religious education.

(3) It is pedagogically unsound to separate secular and religious education, to give purely secular instruction in the school and to leave the matter of religious instruction entirely to the churches. The child must be given to understand that religion should suffuse the whole of life.

Ex-president Hadley of Yale is credited with the statement: "I do not believe you are going to make the right kind of citizens by a godless education, and by then adding religion afterward. The idea is wrong. Education and religion must go hand in hand."

(4) The rights of parents in respect to the religious education of their children take precedence over the claims of the state on the children for purposes of education.

Very few educators of note favored the attempts recently made in Michigan and Oregon to compel children of certain ages to attend the public school.

The defeat of the proposed child labor constitutional amendment is also significant in this connection. Many opposed it on the ground that it would have placed too many restrictions on the rights of parents over their children.

(5) Sectarian instruction may not be given in the public school. That public funds may not be used to foster the particular religion of some citizens, and that the rights of minorities should be respected, are two fundamental principles of our American commonwealth.

On these five points, as was said, there is rather widespread agreement in America today.

But now, is it not exceedingly interesting that the advocates of our free Christian schools have for decades been stressing these very points and basing their pleas upon them? As a matter of fact we have here little else than a statement of some of the basic Reformed principles of education.

May we conclude that many of the foremost pedagogues of our land and the advocates of free Christian schools have come to agreement? In a way yes, but in another way not at all. The conclusions which they draw from the aforementioned five points differ quite radically.

The former conclude that the time has come for giving religious education in the public school.

While many Christians hail this conclusion with great joy, I am willing to admit that I view it with apprehension. Let me say why.

There is much talk about *religious* education, very little about *Christian* education, in the public school. There is reason for that. As was already indicated, it would be un-American to make the public school positively Christian. At best the religion of the

public school will have to remain very general. Only such views may be taught as are common to Romanism, Orthodox Protestantism, Modernism, Judaism, and perhaps some more "isms." But I wish to say emphatically that Christian parents may not be satisfied with such colorless religious education for their children. They must see to it that they get the colorful religion of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. If the parents fail in this, there is grave danger that their children will be lost for the one true religion.

It is possible that before long the Bible, the book of the Christian religion, will be read in public schools throughout the land. In a way that would be cause for joy. But is there not a real danger that this may lull Christian parents into a false sense of security and bring them under the illusionary spell that at last their children are getting a Christian education in the public schools? The Bible is wont to be read from ultra-Modernist pulpits, but this does not make these pulpits Christian. Bible-reading will not render the public school Christian any more than the reading of occasional passages from the Koran or stories from Greek or Roman mythology makes them Mohammedan or pagan.

The religious instruction given in the public school will have to be neutral, of course. But can it be? I hold that it is psychologically impossible for any teacher to give perfectly neutral religious instruction. In a class in Bible in a public high school in a Michigan city the teacher recently ridi-

culed those who still hold that the Bible is God's infallible word. The danger is far from imaginary that religious instruction in the public schools will be misleading. I would rather have my child attend a school which makes no attempt at religious education than one which teaches religion erroneously.

We conclude that Christian parents are in sacred duty bound to provide free Christian schools for their children because there alone can they expect them to receive a positively Christian training.

I want to mention a few additional reasons, mostly of a practical nature, why I favor the Christian school.

I have noticed that some children attending the public school get under the spell of Modernism even before graduating from the junior high school, many more in high school. I am convinced that the instruction given in the public schools in many cases breeds unbelief.

Mixed marriages, one of the greatest evils under the sun, can often be traced back to associations begun at the public school.

I have had abundant opportunity to observe that the pupils of Christian schools, with few exceptions, have incomparably more knowledge of the Bible than those in attendance at public schools.

Churches are wont to establish positively Christian schools on their mission fields. Is it not the height of inconsistency for church-members to send their own children to non-Christian schools? I once heard

Dr. Samuel Zwemer tell a Christian audience that their children were getting less Christian education than many Mohammedan pupils at mission schools.

Experience teaches that the pupils of our Christian schools are more apt to remain loyal to their denomination than those of our Reformed children who attend the public schools. It is my firm conviction that our future as positively Reformed churches is largely wrapped up in the free Christian schools.

I believe that Christian schools train the best citizens. They inculcate the very highest motive for loyalty to government and country; namely, the religious. He who loves this land for God's sake is the highest type of American patriot.

The question has repeatedly been asked of late whether the time has not arrived for us to put our Christian schools on a broader basis. Up to the present they have really been Reformed. Should we not make them more generally Christian and then invite the co-operation of orthodox Christians of all denominations?

To me it seems that this question should be answered negatively. Let us by all means keep our Christian schools strictly Reformed!

Of several reasons that might be given I name just two.

As Reformed parents we believe that the covenant idea should permeate the whole training of our children. But how very evident then that the Baptists

could not co-operate wholeheartedly with us in the matter of religious education, nor we with them. This is but one illustration. The point is this: doctrinal differences would in some cases make co-operation a practical impossibility.

What settles the question for me is this. We are convinced that Calvinism is not merely a type of Christianity alongside other equally valid types. It is for us the fullest, the most nearly perfect, interpretation of Christianity in existence. Can we rest satisfied with giving our children anything short of the very best?

This, however, does not preclude every possibility of co-operation. There is no good reason why our schools should virtually be denominational. There is every reason why the truly Reformed elements of such churches as the Reformed, the Christian Reformed, the United and the Reformed Presbyterian, and the Presbyterian Churches both North and South, should join forces in this all-important task.

Finally I want to say that we may not be satisfied with our Christian schools as they are today. They have progressed wonderfully in the last twenty-five years. But this is no time at all for us to sit back in smug complacency.

We need better school boards. Let us put more men and women on them who have some knowledge of things educational.

We need highly trained teachers. We want teachers who can and will teach, not merely men and

women who think they have done their duty when they try to find out how well or how poorly the pupils have taught themselves. We must have real pedagogues. To this end a thorough normal course of our own is required.

We need better equipment, including better buildings. This will entail great financial sacrifice, but the welfare of our God-given children is at stake.

We need centralization. In unity is strength. The Union of Christian schools is a fine attempt in this direction.

Our schools should become more manifestly Christian. A Christian atmosphere should fill the classrooms and be in evidence on the play-grounds. That will be the case only if we take pains to secure teachers with noble Christian characters.

We should by all means propagate the principles underlying our Christian schools. What is good for us and our children is good for others. We should let our light shine.

And never may we rest until we have a complete system of Christian education, from the kindergarten up through the university.

Church Discipline

CHAPTER XIII.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

IT GOES without saying that I do not purpose to give anything like an exhaustive treatment of the subject of church discipline. Relative to this subject I just want to mention a few matters of which I believe our Reformed people need to be reminded.

Let me begin by stating the underlying principle of Reformed or Presbyterian church government in general, of church discipline in particular. It is that Christ is pleased to rule his church through the instrumentality of the office-bearers, especially the elders. They derive their authority not from the members of the church, but from Christ himself. In our age and land of democracy there is danger that we may forget this. Many who call themselves Reformed actually are forgetting it. It is supposed that the elders get their authority from the members, that they therefore are to carry out the wishes of the members. Fact is that they get it from Christ, through the channel of election by the members to be sure, yet from Christ, and their one aim should be to please the Lord Christ. Therefore the members must be subject to them for Christ's sake.

Church discipline concerns itself with two matters: the doctrine and the life of church-members.

For both phases there is a sound Biblical basis. Said Paul to Titus: "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject."—3:10. And the same apostle commanded the Christians at Corinth with reference to a certain fornicator: "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."—I Corinthians 5:13.

In this age of doctrinal indifference a great many churches are woefully lax in the exercise of discipline on heretics. A truly Reformed church will strongly stress purity of doctrine. Reformed churches that were worthy of their name have ever done so. The church that harbors heretics is not Reformed. And the church that tolerates departures from the fundamental teachings of Christianity forfeits its claim to the name Christian.

It has been charged that the Reformed churches emphasize purity of doctrine at the expense of probability of life. In isolated cases there may have been ground for this charge. But surely it may not be laid at the door of Reformed churches generally. I make bold to say that of all churches the Reformed are most faithful in disciplining members leading godless lives. Is it not significant that Geneva was a model city from a moral viewpoint when the great dogmatician John Calvin controlled it?

The exceeding seriousness of ecclesiastical censure seems to be little understood. Those who are being censured often make light of it. And, what is more surprising, even Consistories sometimes appear ig-

norant of its full import. I have heard the opinion voiced that excommunication amounts to no more than exclusion from the denomination. Fact is that, when a Consistory places a member under the so-called first step of censure, it says in effect: "If you do not repent, we, to whom Christ, the King of the church, has entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven, will exclude you from the kingdom, will declare that you have no fellowship with Christ."

It follows that Consistories should be most careful in the exercise of discipline. Never should a member be censured until it is absolutely certain on Biblical grounds that he is guilty of a sin which, if not repented of, will land him in perdition.

Mere errors of judgment then cannot be cause for discipline. It will not do to excommunicate a member because he feels that he can no longer subscribe to the Reformed doctrine of predestination or infant baptism or common grace. It would be a mistake too to censure a member who fails to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a given church because he has honest scruples of conscience against the use of the individual cup.

On the other hand, the slightest offense which is obviously a sin and is not repented of in spite of admonition, renders one worthy of discipline. Not only the overt act of adultery or murder is censurable, but also the telling of a mean little lie. The former sins, if repented of, will be forgiven. The latter, if not repented of, renders one liable to eternal

torment. This Dr. Bouwman of the Netherlands has in mind when he says in his book on *Church Discipline* that "every sin is censurable." Paradoxically it may be said that no sin is censurable as such; but refusal to repent renders one worthy of discipline.

The question might be asked what a Reformed church should do about a member who is no longer soundly Reformed in the matter of doctrine but otherwise gives evidence of being a sincere Christian. First of all the Consistory should, of course, try to convince him of his error. If this fails, he should be advised to unite with a denomination where he would fit in better. If for any reason this should prove impossible, it might be possible to tolerate him as a member on condition that he does not disturb the peace and unity of the church by propagating his erroneous views. But if he should prove unwilling to submit to this condition, I would say the only way out would be simply to erase his name from the rolls.

I realize that the Church Order of Dordt makes no provision for such erasure. According to it the only way to deprive one of membership is by excommunication. But it should be remembered that our Reformed fathers of the seventeenth century had little or no conception of the pluriformity of the church. They assumed that the Reformed Church was the only Christian church in the Netherlands. Today we hold a different view, due especially to the stress placed by Dr. A. Kuyper on the pluriformity

of the church. One may differ theoretically on several points from our Reformed Confessions and yet be a Christian. Such a person can hardly be a member of a Reformed church. But surely it will never do to exclude him from the kingdom by excommunication.

Not only confessing members of the church may become the objects of discipline, but those as well who are members only by baptism. The theory of this is perfectly evident. It follows directly from the Reformed doctrine of the covenant that those who have received baptism are members of the church as an organization. It is not surprising then that Section 131 of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America states this matter. But alas for the practice!

I am convinced that one big reason why so many young people are right along being lost for the church is to be found in the fact that those who stray are so seldom disciplined.

And is it not obvious that failure to embrace the covenant promises and to assume the covenant obligations by the making of confession of faith on arriving at years of discretion, is abundantly sufficient cause for discipline? Such a sin of omission is equally grievous as many a sin of commission commonly recognized as heinous.

There is some misunderstanding about the purpose of church discipline.

The purpose is not, as is often thought, to rid the

church of members who are more or less troublesome. In almost every church there are one or two members who seem to feel in sacred duty bound to sow seeds of discord. I do not say that such persons should be left unmolested. To the contrary, the Consistory should take hold of them firmly and fearlessly. But when the Consistory does this, it should not aim at their destruction, but at their conversion.

The purpose of church discipline may never be to drive members into obedience through mere fear. To be sure, it is well to call the attention of erring members to the dire consequence of their persisting in sin. But fear apart from love is a poor guide. And obedience prompted by fear alone is not really obedience. Let us purge out the leaven of Roman Catholicism!

Church discipline is not a punitive measure in the same sense as penalties exacted by the state. It should ever be kept purely spiritual. For instance, when a murderer shows true repentance, the state will yet punish him because justice must be satisfied, but the church will no more think of punishing him, for God in Christ has forgiven him. And in case there is no repentance, the state will punish him without more ado, while the church will discipline him in hopes of leading him to repentance.

What then is the purpose of church discipline? It is three-fold.

It aims to uphold the honor of Christ, the Head of the Church.

It seeks to maintain the purity of the church and of the holy sacraments just as far as possible.

It is designed to save erring members.

Let it be added here that the church keeps hoping and praying and laboring for the salvation even of the excommunicated. It stands ready with open arms to receive them as soon as they give proof of heartfelt repentance. Jesus said that an excommunicated person is to us "as a heathen man and a publican." Surely Christians do not give heathen and publicans the cold shoulder. They seek to lead them to the Savior.

I sometimes hear church-members complain about the unfaithfulness of their Consistory in the matter of church discipline. Then I ask them whether they themselves are in the habit of exercising church discipline. They usually reply that it is none of their business. But it is. Church discipline should begin with the members. Every Christian should discipline himself. And the Christian who sees a brother stray should do his utmost to turn him from the error of his way. In case he fails, it becomes his duty to report the case to the Consistory.

There is a matter of discipline on which the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed differ. It concerns membership in oath-bound secret organizations, such as the Masonic order and other lodges patterned after it.

It is important that the attitude of the two denominations toward the lodge be properly understood.

To say that the Reformed Church in America tolerates lodge-members is very inexact. The General Synod has left the matter to the individual Consistories. Some Consistories are firmly convinced that lodge-membership is inconsistent with church-membership, and they act accordingly. Other Consistories tolerate the members of lodges. And still others see no harm at all in the lodge and consequently do not merely tolerate its members as members of the church, but are as glad to have them as any others.

In this connection it should be noted that a number of Reformed Church leaders are very strongly opposed to the lodge. In recent years the Reverend J. F. Heemstra and the late Reverend Peter Braak have held the presidency of the National Christian Association, which makes it its sole business to combat secret societies.

Many seem to think that the Christian Reformed Church teaches that a lodge-member cannot possibly get to heaven. But that is a mistake. Emphatically, that is not the Christian Reformed view. It is a matter of general knowledge that the late Wm. J. Bryan was a Mason. But surely the most ardent opponent of Masonry would hardly have the courage to assign this champion of the Christian religion to perdition. The position of the Christian Reformed Church is simply this: membership in a lodge is inconsistent with Christianity; therefore no member of a lodge should be received as a member of the

church of Jesus Christ; and if a church-member joins a lodge he must be instructed and admonished, and, in case he fails to give heed, disciplined. In other words, while it is possible on the one hand that a real Christian might commit the inconsistency of joining a lodge, yet, on the other hand, the lodge-member who persists in the error of his way after it has been clearly pointed out to him, thereby gives evidence of not being a Christian.

I have heard it said with a little sneer that undoubtedly there are a few lodge-members in the Christian Reformed Church. I simply want to affirm that not a single Christian Reformed Consistory will tolerate them.

It has been said that the difference between the attitude of the two denominations toward secret societies is solely a matter of church polity: the Reformed Church does not think it proper that Synod should dictate to the Consistories as to whom they should discipline, while the Christian Reformed church holds that Synod may do this; and this is all there is of it. But surely that view is altogether too naive. Fact is that the difference goes much more deeply. *A large part of the membership of the Reformed Church in America, including many leaders, see nothing unchristian about membership in the lodge; the Christian Reformed Church as a whole is firmly convinced of the antichristian character of Masonry and kindred organizations. There is the rub.*

In view of what has just been said in the foregoing paragraph, I do not think it worth while to enter upon a long discussion of the points of church polity involved. They are not the real issue. At most they may be called a side-issue. There is not the least doubt in my mind that the policy of the two denominations was determined, not primarily by consideration of a church-governmental nature, but very directly by the estimation in which they held the lodge. The Synods of the Reformed Church did not see their way clear to condemn the lodge as anti-christian; therefore they left the matter of disciplining lodge-members or not to the discretion of the Consistories. The Synods of the Christian Reformed Church were convinced that the lodge is antichristian; and therefore they decided once for all that lodge-members could not be tolerated in the church. Now, frankly, what is the use of arguing at length a few points of church polity when a much more fundamental issue is at stake?

I do want to say that the policy of the Christian Reformed Church is fully justifiable. History tells us that Reformed Synods in the Netherlands have repeatedly pronounced membership in antichristian organizations censurable. The Synod of Leeuwarden, 1920, resolved that there is no room for a member of the Reformed Church in an organization whose avowed purpose is to foster strife between capital and labor. And the Synod of Utrecht, 1923, decided that Consistories should censure those members who

join the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and, in spite of admonitions, persist in this evil.

I would also call attention to it that the policy of the Reformed Church in America leads to difficulties. If some Consistories tolerate lodge-members and others do not, then manifestly it may happen that one church will refuse to receive into its communion a person who comes as a member in perfectly good standing from another church of the same denomination. Some churches honor as ministers of Christ men whom other churches would not tolerate as members. And is it not somewhat inconsistent for ministers and elders who bar lodge-members from the Holy Supper in their own local church to celebrate this Sacrament with lodge-members at the General Synod?

Just why is lodge-membership censurable?

It is not tenable that it is in every case sinful and censurable for a Christian to be a member of the same organization with non-Christians.

Neither may a Christian be held personally responsible for every sin committed by the organization to which he belongs. In some cases he may, by entering a protest, clear his own conscience.

Therefore the Reformed churches of the Netherlands and America both have consistently refused to pronounce membership in each and every labor union censurable.

But when an organization is manifestly and avowedly antichristian in its very nature, then the

church-member who joins it renders himself liable to discipline.

Masonry and kindred lodges are antichristian.

Strange to say, there are church-members in the lodge who are not at all aware of its antichristian character. They should be dealt with patiently. They need to be educated. But this does not mean that they may be tolerated in the church indefinitely. If they refuse to break off their connection with the lodge, they will eventually have to be excommunicated.

The oaths of Masonry are such that no Christian may take them. Not only is their content horrible, but he who takes them promises obedience to "the constitution, laws and edicts" as well as "all due signs and summons sent from the lodge", without being fully cognizant of what these may be. This amounts to giving divine honor to men. The taking of these oaths constitutes a transgression of the first as well as the third commandment of the Decalogue.

There is blasphemy in the Masonic ritual. To mention but one instance, on page 286 of Mackey's *Masonic Ritualist* there is a picture of the Masonic keystone with this remark: "The following passage of Scripture is here appropriately introduced: 'This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head-stone of the corner.' " Words which the Holy Spirit applied to the Christ, Masonry applies to its keystone.

We pass on to something more general.

Masonry is a religion. This is indisputable. It claims to be a religion. "Masonry is a 'religious institution,' its ceremonies are 'part of a really religious worship.'"—Mackey's *Encyclopedia of Masonry*, page 10. "All the ceremonies of our order are prefaced and terminated with prayer because Masonry is a religious institution."—Mackey's *Lexicon*, page 371.

As a religion it stresses two tenets. They are: the existence of a Supreme Being and the immortality of the human soul. One must believe these two truths in order to become a Mason. Now it must be observed that these tenets are common to all religions the world over. That is very significant. Masonry boasts of the universality of its religion. "In its language citizens of every nation may converse; at its altar men of all religions may kneel; to its creed disciples of every faith may subscribe."—Mackey's *Encyclopedia*, page 162.

But who is the God of Masonry? Is it the God of Christianity, the God of the Bible, the God whom Jesus Christ revealed and of whom he said: "I and the Father are one," and again, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father"? Manifestly not. Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists worship the God of Masonry as well as those who call themselves Christians. From many Scriptural quotations in the Masonic ritual the name of Jesus Christ has been erased. On page 271 of Mackey's *Masonic Ritualist*, for instance, the phrase "by Jesus Christ" is omitted

from I Peter 2:5, and on the next page the explanation is given: "The passages are taken with slight but necessary modifications from the second chapter of the first epistle of Peter." The prayers of the lodge too are not supposed to be offered in the name of Christ. The Sovereign Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows ruled in 1888 that to pray in Christ's name in the lodge is "inexpedient, unwise, and unlawful."

It follows that the religion of the lodge is idolatry.

And what about the lodge's teaching concerning the future life? It is the plain teaching of Masonry that one may be saved by leading a virtuous life, in particular by practicing the morality of the lodge, without reference to Jesus Christ. Says Macoy in *General History, Cyclopedia and Dictionary of Freemasonry*, page 147: "The definitions of Freemasonry have been numerous, and they all unite in declaring it to be a system of morality, by the practice of which its members may advance their spiritual interests, and mount by the theological ladder from the lodge on earth to the lodge in heaven." The following lines occur in the burial ceremony of the Modern Woodmen:

"So let him sleep that dreamless sleep,
Our sorrows clustering round his head.
Be comforted, ye loved who weep.
He lives with God. He is not dead."

But a doctrine of salvation which leaves out the Christ is antichristian. For his name is the only name given under heaven by which men may be

saved. And he himself declared: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me."

I want to register a personal conviction. I doubt not that the lodge with its religion, altars, chaplains, priests, rituals, etc., is Satan's imitation of Christ's church. Satan has often been called God's ape. Magic and witchcraft are his imitation of God's miracles. Fortune-telling and sooth-saying are counterfeit prophecies. That so many men and women were possessed of demons during Jesus' stay on earth may be accounted for on the score that Satan was attempting to mimic the incarnation. In much the same way that religious institution which is known as the lodge is Satan's simulation of Christ's church.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said: 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' 'Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate,' saith the Lord, 'and touch not the unclean thing.' 'And I will receive you and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,' saith the Lord Almighty."—II Corinthians 6:14-18.

Church Music

CHAPTER XIV.

CHURCH MUSIC

THERE are those who hold that in a Reformed church only the Psalms should be sung in public worship. They advance at least two arguments for this position. One is derived from principle, the other from history. The Psalms, in distinction from most of the hymns, are based directly on God's inspired Word. And the seceders of 1834 in the Netherlands, as well as the founders of the Christian Reformed Church in America in 1857, objected strenuously to the hymns that were in use in the churches from which they parted.

While these arguments are not conclusive, it cannot be denied that they have some force.

Nobody who knows anything about the subject claims that the Psalms as they are wont to be sung in our churches are verbally inspired. It is well known that they are a rather free rendering of the Psalms as found in the Bible. Yet it is evident that the men who composed our metrical versions of the Psalms were guided more directly by the Bible, and held themselves more closely to the Bible, than the writers of the great majority of the hymns. They must have had the Word of God right before them practically all the time. I believe that this fact goes

a long way toward accounting for the greater richness, depth, dignity, and solemnity of the Psalms. As for me, most of the hymns strike me as being rather superficial, several almost puerile, in comparison with the Psalms. With this same thing in mind, certain leaders of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have suggested that, if hymns are to be added to the Psalms, these hymns should be based directly on certain portions of the New Testament.

It is true in a general way that our Reformed fathers were opposed to the singing of hymns in public worship. But it can hardly be contended truthfully that they condemned all hymns from principle. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have long used *Eenige Gezangen* as found behind the Psalter. Their ministers have quoted hymns in the pulpit almost from time immemorial. And the objections that were raised to the hymns usually concerned one specific point; viz., Arminianism. Because several of the hymns contained traces of Arminianism our Reformed fathers rejected them, and in order to guard against this error, as well as others, in the future, they decided to hold themselves to the singing of the Psalms in public worship. Their motive deserves warm commendation.

Today there is a strong movement in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands for the addition of some hymns to the Psalter. It is backed by several of the most respected and trusted leaders. To men-

tion just one, Dr. V. Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam has come out in its favor. Such momentum has this movement gained that there is little doubt of its ultimate success.

I would like to go on record as being heart and soul in favor of this project for the Christian Reformed Church in America. I would retain the Psalms and add some carefully selected hymns.

Instead of presenting a possible array of arguments, let me stress just one consideration. It alone, it seems to me, should already prove conclusive.

Reformed theology teaches that the revelation of God which we have in the Bible is progressive. God saw fit to unfold his truth gradually before the eyes of men. The construction of the Bible closely resembled the growth of a flower. In very broad terms it may be said that in the Pentateuch we have the simple bud; in the prophets we find this bud much swollen; and in the New Testament the bud bursts into full bloom. Now the Psalms are, of course, part of the Old Testament. In all seriousness I submit the question whether a New Testament church may rest satisfied with these Old Testament songs. To do so strikes me as a serious, not to say sinful, lack of appreciation of the fuller revelation of God which we possess in the New Testament.

Let me express the same thought in other words. The Old Testament teems with references to the coming Messiah. That holds of the Psalms too. And

yet the Christ is there only in shadows. In the New Testament we deal no longer with shadows, but with "the body"; the Christ himself puts in his appearance; we see, we hear, we touch him. Shall we of today be content with singing of the Christ only in terms of the dispensation of shadows? How can we? Very concretely expressed, I plead for the privilege of singing in our churches the blessed name of *Jesus*, which our fathers and mothers delighted to celebrate in that sweetest of all Dutch hymns:

"Er ruischt langs de wolken een lieflijke naam,
Die hemel en aarde vereenigt te saam.
Geen naam is er zoeter en beter voor 't hart;
Hij balsemt de wonden en heelt alle smart"—

and which we are wont to adore:

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrow, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.
It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest."

No, I do not insist on these very hymns, but it is my sincere conviction that there ought to be introduced certain hymns which exalt the name *Jesus* as highly, or even more so.

Or shall we, who live in this dispensation of the Spirit, sing only in terms derived from another dis-

pensation, when the Holy Spirit was not yet poured out as he was on the day of Pentecost?

Let it be added that in some of our Psalters we find appended to the Psalms fifty-two hymns "arranged and numbered agreeably to the fifty-two Lord's Days of the Heidelberg Catechism." By way of a concession the Christian Reformed Church once upon a time decided to allow their use in certain eastern churches. Similarly the church has permitted the use of some hymns in the German churches of the West. The Synod of 1922 refused to retract these concessions, though an overture to that effect had been presented. Now this shows that our churches have never been unalterably opposed from principle to the use of hymns in public worship.

But it is my opinion that we had better discard the fifty-two hymns referred to. Doctrinally they are good, but almost all of them are sadly lacking in poetic value.

Just now choir singing in public worship threatens to become a bone of contention in the Christian Reformed Church.

So far as I know, nobody objects to a choir for the leading of congregational singing, but there are many who fear that choir singing will tend to lessen congregational singing. This fear is not without ground. In many churches round about us there is so much singing by the choir alone that the congregation hardly gets a chance, and when the congregation is asked to sing, a large portion of it, rely-

ing on the choir to carry the hymn through to its conclusion, makes hardly any effort of its own. Surely, our churches should profit by this experience of others. Never should a church introduce a choir without taking strong measures to prevent this evil.

There is another evil often found in connection with choir singing. Not infrequently men or women are asked to sing in a church choir without the least regard for their religion, simply because they are talented. And so it happens that individuals without any just claim to Christianity get up before the congregation to sing the most touching Christian hymns. How can they sing from the heart? Such singing is hypocrisy. It is a great evil in the church.

Withal I think the Synod of Englewood, 1926, acted wisely when it refused to place an absolute ban on choirs. The Word of God neither prescribes nor condemns choir singing. Then the church should be exceedingly careful about legislating on the matter. Says Article 32 of our Confession: "We reject all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever." General rules are sometimes required for the preservation of concord, but compelling laws in matters indifferent are hardly in order. It is difficult to see why, for instance, a song by a choir, while the offering is being received, would not be at least as edifying as an offertory by the organist. If there are special vocal talents in a church, I verily believe that God is glorified if they

are employed in special singing during public worship. And I can easily see how one might argue with some success that not to do so is a sin of omission.

The solemn, stately music of the pipe organ seems especially well adapted for public worship. But it does not follow that the use of other instruments in the church is to be condemned. There can hardly be any objection from principle to the playing of an orchestra, or even a band, on various occasions. Likely there are those who will take exception to this statement, but I am convinced that they have no more ground under their feet than the man who refused to attend the exercises held in the church in connection with the dedication of a new organ because, as he said, "Dagon is being dedicated"; or the people who consider piano music essentially worldly. We Calvinists are altogether too negligent about requisitioning the various fine arts, including music, for the glorification of the Author of all good and perfect gifts. Whenever I read about the instrumental music of the Old Testament temple, and especially when I read Psalm 150, where God's people are told to praise him in his sanctuary with the sound of the trumpet, the psaltery and harp, the timbrel, stringed instruments and organs, loud cymbals and high sounding cymbals, I wonder why we employ so very few instruments in our churches.

It is of course impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule as to how large a part of the time

usually allotted for a Sunday service may be devoted to music, and how much of it should be reserved for the service of prayer and preaching. It is well known that in many churches music is cutting in on the sermon to an alarming extent. If we want to stay in line with Reformed tradition, which is in perfect harmony with the practice of the apostles, we may never allow the preaching of the Word to be crowded. The sermon must ever remain the big thing.

But church music too is important. The Bible tells us that there is going to be much of music, both vocal and instrumental, in heaven. Let us have much of it in heaven's portal, the church, and let us make it as heavenly as may be. Also in this matter "let us go on to perfection."

Should the Reformed and the Christian
Reformed Churches Merge?

CHAPTER XV.

SHOULD THE REFORMED AND THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES MERGE?

IN THE course of the past three years my opinion has often been asked regarding the advisability of a union of the Christian Reformed Church with the Reformed Church in America. My reply has always been guarded and will be now.

The subject is timely. There is a mighty movement on foot toward church-union. It is co-extensive with Christianity. Very recently the Presbyterian, the Methodist, and the Congregational churches of Canada united. In England much is being said and written about the possible return of the Episcopalian Church to the Roman Catholic fold. And to mention but one other instance out of a possible dozen, the merging of the Reformed Church in America, once Dutch, with the Reformed Church in the United States, originally German, has been seriously suggested.

It appears then that, if steps should be taken toward the organic union of the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches, this would be in harmony with the spirit of the age. That in itself may strike some persons as a conclusive argument for union. Those who have fallen under the spell of

the exceedingly superficial evolutionary view that day by day in practically every way the world is getting better and better, quite naturally prefer the new to the old, are anxious to get on the inside of almost any new movement, and jump to the conclusion that the spirit of the age must be commendable.

As a matter of fact the spirit of the age may be largely evil.

The advocates of church-union in general like to quote certain sentences from the Savior's intercessory or high-priestly prayer as recorded in John Seventeen. "Holy Father," said Jesus, "keep through thine ~~own~~ name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are"; and again: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

Jesus is praying here for the union of all believers. It is concluded that Christians may not rest until all Christian churches on the face of the globe shall have been amalgamated. But it may be seriously questioned whether the conclusion follows from the premise. If anything is perfectly obvious, it is that Jesus had in mind spiritual unity. But spirit-

ual unity is not identical with oneness of organization. I dare say that the spiritual oneness of believers does not even require that they all be members of the same organization. They might be in different organizations and yet be one at heart. It is also possible for many persons to be in one organization and to be far from one.

Concretely it follows that it cannot be shown conclusively from John Seventeen alone that the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches should merge. If each should insist on maintaining its separate denominational existence, violence would indeed be done to a superficial interpretation of Jesus' words, but not necessarily to his words themselves.

It is rather generally assumed today that it is an evil that the Christian church is divided into denominations. No doubt there is much that is evil about it. Sin has done more than anything else to split up the Christian church. History tells us that especially the sins of heresy and selfishness have wrought division. Then too, time and again new denominations have been started for reasons so slight that they could hardly be called more than flimsy pretexts. And who will deny that undue denominational fervor often leads to narrowness, intolerance, even bitterness?

But there is another side to the matter. There are some perfectly natural reasons why the followers of the Christ are grouped in different denominations.

Geography has much to do with it. Was it not largely for geographical reasons that the Dutch Reformed Church in America very early in its history declared itself ecclesiastically independent from the State Church of the Netherlands? National traits are a more important factor. It would seem that the phlegmatic Hollander and the highly emotional African had better continue, for the time being at least, to worship in separate denominations. To mention but one more matter, there is the limitation of our human minds to be considered. Not one of us is able to grasp the full truth of God. Neither can any one group of Christians do it. Every group of Christians is more or less one-sided in its conception of the truth. In this dispensation such is simply inevitable. And now it is well that one denomination stresses certain truths, another others, a third still others, and so on.

We conclude that no one may say that, because denominationalism as such is an evil, the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches must get together in organic union.

It cannot be disputed that, on the whole, the Modernists of our day favor the cause of church-union more strongly than do the Fundamentalists. The reason is apparent. Modernists care little about creeds and doctrines. But these largely constitute the barriers between denominations. Which is only another way of saying that much of present-day clamor for church-union must be accounted for on

the score of doctrinal indifference. How readily men say that this doctrine or that is "non-essential"! How often one hears it suggested that, since the beliefs which the denominations have in common are so much more numerous than the views which differentiate them, the latter should be suppressed.

It follows that no suggestion toward church-union should be acted on hastily. The doctrinal issue should always be weighed carefully.

Whether the men and women who in 1857 severed their connection with the Dutch Reformed Church and organized the Christian Reformed Church were justified in taking this action, has been the subject of frequent and warm debates. It might seem that on the correct answer to this question depends what answer must be given to the inquiry written over this chapter. More than once has it been contended that, since the "seceders" of 1857 erred, it is the manifest duty of their children to rectify their mistake and to return in a body to the mother church.

However, the case is not as simple as all that. I am by no means ready to grant that the "seceders" were mistaken. But let us assume for the sake of argument that they were, that they should have continued in the Reformed Church. Does sound logic then compel us to conclude that the two denominations are in sacred duty bound to merge forthwith? Not at all. Even if sufficient reasons for dissension had been lacking in 1857, they might very well have arisen since that time.

In order to make the point perfectly clear, let us make another assumption. Let us assume, again for the sake of argument, that conditions in the Reformed Church were so thoroughly bad in 1857 that the action of the so-called seceders was fully warranted. It would not necessarily follow that the Reformed and the Christian Reformed Church should today continue as two denominations. It is conceivable that conditions in the former church might since have grown so much better that every good reason for dissension had disappeared.

In a word, no conclusive argument either for or against the union of the two churches can be derived from 1857. He who seeks to answer the question before us will have to reckon with the present rather than the past.

I believe that, as a matter of fact, the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches have since 1857 been drifting apart. To be frank, it seems to me that there is more reason for separate denominational existence now than then. In the last seventy years the Reformed Church has slowly on been losing its Reformed character, while the Christian Reformed Church has, generally speaking, grown more soundly Reformed.

Some of the reasons presented by the "seceders" of 1857 for their action were, to say the least, not very weighty. Measured by our present standards, the founders of the Christian Reformed Church were in some respects rather narrow. Every student of

the subject will have to admit that. With reference to certain little matters, differences between the two churches have by this time disappeared.

Under no circumstances should prejudice be allowed to keep the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches apart. And yet, how much of prejudice there is on both sides! I have heard members of the Christian Reformed Church say that the Reformed Church exercises hardly any discipline at all. Such will be interested to know that the Synod of 1925 reported a loss through discipline of sixty-seven communicant members in a year. During my stay in the Reformed Church I was often pained and occasionally amused by views prevalent about the Christian Reformed Church. Once a sister said to me that, seeing I came from the "seceder" church, she wondered how I could favor missions. A brother once told me that a member of the Christian Reformed Church had related to him that he had seen black snow on the day of his conversion, and our good friend of the Reformed Church concluded that this conversion must be typically Christian Reformed. There are those in the Reformed Church who think there is no difference between the Christian Reformed Church and the "Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk." Many Reformed people regard us as a very ignorant, backward, narrow-minded, uncultured lot. Almost invariably we are called "seceders," in spite of our repeated protest that we do not deserve that appellation.

So far this chapter has been of a somewhat rambling nature. Let me now come more directly to the point.

In his book *Landmarks of the Reformed Fathers*, Mr. Wm. O. Van Eyck greatly deplores the fact that the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches exist side by side as separate denominations. "On the road from Holland to Drenthe, there is, or was, a hill, about three miles east of Holland, whence could be seen, some forty years ago, in different directions, the white steeples of some ten or twelve Dutch churches. . . . There are today some fifty of these Dutch churches in Ottawa and Allegan counties alone. . . . But upon closer examination, the fact stares us in the face that among these Hollanders we find at each place not one—but two—churches, sometimes at swords' points, and bitter in their relations." Disputes among these churches he calls "religious wars which have disgraced the Hollanders in the West." He even speaks of "the terrible state of affairs that has existed among us for sixty years or more."—pages 39, 40.

Without assuming responsibility for every one of Van Eyck's expressions, who will not admit that, on the face of it, it is a great pity that the Christian Reformed and the Reformed people of the middle West could not from the start have continued together in one denomination? Who was to blame for the fact of the separation does not concern us now. But oh, that it never had come to pass! Were

not the members of these two churches of one blood and of one confession? How much wrangling among brethren and blind prejudice might have been avoided! What duplication would have been prevented! How many men and women and how much money might have been spared for the larger work of the kingdom! How much more influence might have been exerted with a united front! And—may we not add?—how much more glory would have accrued unto the King of the church!

Reformed leaders in the Netherlands often call it a sin that the Reformed Christians of that land are ecclesiastically divided. It is maintained that it is their duty before God to get together as soon as possible in one body. I dare say the same thing about the truly Reformed Christians of these United States. There is sin in their continuing divided. Once more, who is at fault I shall not try to decide, though I may as well record the opinion that all the blame may not be fixed on one group. But so much is very certain: there is something wrong somewhere.

What a happy day it would be on which all the soundly Reformed Christians of America, now scattered through different denominations, would organize in one big Reformed church!

From what has just been said some reader might conclude that it is my conviction that the Reformed and the Christian Reformed churches should merge as soon as may be. But that does not follow. To

say that the Reformed Christians in the two denominations should get together is quite a different thing from saying that the two denominations should combine. Obviously not every member of the two churches is a thoroughbred Calvinist.

And yet, who would not bless the day, if, without the sacrifice of any worth-while principle, these two organizations would coalesce, and Ephraim would no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex Ephraim, but together they would fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines?

I said: "without the sacrifice of any worth-while principle." But there is the rub. May I be so bold as to name three points which to my mind should be firmly insisted on as conditions for amalgamation?

In the matter of doctrine, wholehearted subscription, not only to the Christian fundamentals, but to the Reformed Standards as well, should be demanded.

In the matter of church government, it would have to be agreed that no member of the Masonic or any similar secret order could be tolerated as a church-member.

As a guarantee for the future, regular catechismal preaching and thorough catechetical instruction should be insisted on. I would add that, while the Christian school is not an ecclesiastical institution, yet an understanding regarding this important matter would be very desirable.

I am sure that these terms would not seem acceptable to a rather large part of the Reformed Church membership. In *The Christian Intelligencer* of February 24, 1926, the Reverend E. C. Vanderlaan for one, says plainly that, because of its "rigid theological conservatism," he would not favor union with the Christian Reformed Church. There is good reason to believe that he represents a considerable group. But it is better for the two churches to stay apart than to get together in a union which is not a union. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

I believe that the all-wise God overrules the affairs of men in such a way that he frequently employs even their sins unto the advancement of his glorious kingdom. Remarkable instances of this sort of thing are recorded in Holy Writ. At the beginning of their second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas got into a dispute as to who was to accompany them. Barnabas favored his relative John Mark. Paul was strongly opposed to him because he had failed to complete the first journey with them. The argument continued to the point of bitterness. The outcome was that Barnabas and Mark went in one direction, while Paul, with Silas, chose another field of operations. So two missionary bands went out instead of one. God's overruling providence used the sins of his servants unto the furtherance of the Gospel.

Is not much the same thing taking place in the case of the Reformed and the Christian Reformed

churches? To be sure, in many ways it would seem that the division is a detriment to the cause of Christ. But on the other hand it looks to me that God is employing the two groups for the performance of two exceedingly important tasks, neither of which might receive quite the emphasis which it now receives, if the groups were one.

God's special purpose for the Reformed Church in America seems to be that it should push the cause of missions with might and main.

God's special purpose for the Christian Reformed Church seems to be that it should preserve, and perhaps develop, the precious heritage of distinctly Reformed doctrines and principles.

Does it follow that the Reformed Church may neglect Calvinism and the Christian Reformed Church missions? God forbid!

Or may it be concluded that the Reformed members of the two churches need put forth no efforts in the direction of union? Again we answer, No! That God overrules our sins to a good end obviously does not justify our continuing in sin.

Some time after the altercation referred to above, Mark again became a helper of Paul. From his Roman prison the apostle wrote to Timothy: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." May the time come soon when the genuinely Reformed Christians in the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches will labor together for the cause of Christ in one organization!

Calvinism's Glory and Present Opportunity

CHAPTER XVI.

CALVINISM'S GLORY AND PRESENT OPPORTUNITY

SAYS Dr. B. B. Warfield in his article *Calvinism* in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*: "It must be confessed that the fortunes of Calvinism in general are not at present at their flood. In America, to be sure, the controversies of the earlier half of the nineteenth century compacted a body of Calvinistic thought which gives way but slowly. . . . And in Holland recent years have seen a notable revival of the Reformed consciousness, especially among the adherents of the Free Churches, which has been felt as widely as Dutch influence extends. . . . But it is probable that few 'Calvinists without reserve' exist at the moment in French-speaking lands: and those who exist in lands of German speech and Eastern Europe appear to owe their inspiration to the teaching of Kohlbrugge. Even in Scotland there has been a remarkable decline in strictness of construction ever since the days of William Cunningham and Thomas J. Crawford."

Without doubt this statement is correct, but I would add that since Dr. Warfield wrote his article there has been an interesting, if not remarkable, revival of Calvinism in Hungary.

Though Calvinism can hardly be said to be flour-

ishing today, yet it seems to me that the outlook is far from discouraging if only the adherents of this system will avail themselves of their present opportunity. As I see it, just now the door is open for the propagation of several principles which, being characteristically Reformed, may be called the glory of Calvinism.

To a few of these principles and the timeliness of their promulgation I would call attention.

(1) It is quite generally admitted that Calvinism is a highly intellectual type of Christianity. This does not mean that it is intellectualistic. Some individuals who call themselves Calvinists may be intellectualistic; Calvinism itself is not. Reformed theology has always insisted that mere knowledge about God is insufficient, that spiritual knowledge of God is essential to salvation. But it has also strongly stressed the necessity of Scriptural knowledge for the saving knowledge of God. Therefore the Reformed churches have ever made much of the religious education of their members. In distinction from the mysticism of various sects and the emotionalism of Methodism, they have upheld the primacy of the intellect. And they are justly proud of John Calvin's system of theology, which gives evidence of so remarkable intellectual acumen.

How very much is being made today of education! Some twenty-five years ago only a small percentage of eighth-grade graduates went on to high school. Today almost all do. Our colleges are being over-

whelmed by a flood of students. Not a few are limiting the number of their students by the application of severe intellectual tests. That means a rise of educational standards. Much might be added here, but enough has been said to show that the intellects of men and women are being trained much more generally than was the case a short time ago, and that an attempt is being made to train them more highly too.

Now I know very well that as to content the instruction given in many of our educational institutions leads away from Calvinism. Yet I would submit the question whether this intellectual age is not the psychological time for the propagation of that highly intellectual religion which we call Calvinism. Of this I am certain: Calvinism is laughed out of court in many schools because it is not understood. And that it is not understood is largely the fault of us Calvinists.

(2) Calvinism is not merely a theology; it is a world-and-life-view built upon a theological principle; viz., the sovereignty of God. It has been described as "the entire body of conceptions, theological, ethical, philosophical, social, political, which under the influence of the master mind of John Calvin, raised itself to dominance in the Protestant lands of the post-Reformation age, and has left a permanent mark not only upon the thought of mankind, but upon the life-history of men, the social order of civilized peoples, and even the political

organization of states." How masterfully Dr. Kuyper set forth Calvinism as a world-and-life-view in his Stone Lectures of 1898! Says Warfield in the article already referred to: "Calvinism has dug a channel through which not merely flows a stream of theological thought, but also surges a great wave of human life." In other words, Calvinism insists that man should be religious not only in such devotional activities as praying, Bible-reading, and church-going, but in all his living: in business, in politics, in recreation, and so on. As Paul put it: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Is it not precisely this kind of religion which the modern man demands? People are more than tired of a mere Sunday religion. Even Modernists are clamoring for a religion which shall embrace all of life and put its stamp on man's every activity. Let us tell the world that we have it!

(3) The glorious doctrine of Christian liberty was stressed by all the Reformers over against Roman Catholic legalism, but to John Calvin belongs the honor of thinking it through fearlessly to its logical conclusions. He departed more radically than Martin Luther from the hierarchical institutions of the church. On Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage", he comments: "If men lay upon our shoulders an unjust burden, it may be borne; but if

they endeavor to bring our consciences into bondage, we must resist valiantly, even to death." That Holland became the cradle of both political and religious liberty was due largely to the fact that the Reformation in the Netherlands bore a distinctly Calvinistic stamp.

At the same time, its high spirituality has ever kept Calvinism from the error of Antinomianism. The Anabaptists of the Reformation age did go to this extreme; the true Calvinists never did. For centuries it has been customary in many Reformed churches to read the Law of God every Sabbath. And has not Calvinism come to be regarded as the very antonym of Libertinism?

It is a well known fact that a wave of lawlessness and licentiousness is rolling over the face of the earth today. Everywhere the question is being asked: "What is going to stem the tide?" Some would add rule to rule and precept to precept. But that will not avail. It may well make things worse. As laws are multiplied, transgressions will the more abound. Others would let things go from bad to worse and from worse to worst, until humanity becomes disgusted with its own bacchanalia and reacts. But that advice is hardly Christian.

The one thing that can save our sin-ridden and law-burdened race is Christianity, in particular Christianity as interpreted by Calvinism. For it points the way to freedom both from the law and from sin. That alone is liberty. It is full liberty.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." "Christ has delivered us from the law." "If the Son shall have made you free, ye shall be free indeed." "And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

(4) Closely associated with Christian liberty is Calvinistic democracy. No man has authority over any other except God lend him authority. The rich may not lord it over the poor because of his wealth; the strong may not boss the weak because of his brawn; the learned may not rule the ignorant because of his superior intelligence. In a real sense all men are equal. Only when it pleases the sovereign God to place certain men over us in authority, do we owe them obedience. And then we should obey willingly for God's sake.

That these United States have from the very start been a republic is no accident. The foundations of the American commonwealth were largely Calvinistic. It is also due in part to Calvinism that there is so much of democracy in the governments of England and the Netherlands. The Presbyterian or Calvinistic form of church government too excels in democracy. Ministers are not assigned to churches by bishops, but are called by Consistories after the members have indicated their preference. And much stress is wont to be placed on "the office of believers." A truly Reformed church will never favor the rich over the poor. For a man to presume to run a

church just because he has money, is an abomination.

It has often been said that the world war was fought in order "to make the world safe for democracy." By this time we have learned to take this, as well as many other war slogans, with several grains of salt. But it can hardly be denied that there has followed in the wake of the war a disrespect of aristocracy and a rising spirit of democracy. To be sure, many preach unsound democracy; they forget that God stands above the people and that rulers derive their authority not from the people, but from the sovereign God through the people. Yet ours is the age of democracy.

And now is our opportunity to propagate Calvinistic democracy. If now we proclaim it from the housetops, it would seem that men would lend us their ears.

(5) The doctrine of common grace may be called one of the pillars of our Calvinistic world-and-life-view. It tells us that even unregenerated men can do natural, civic, and moral good.

Today there are many noble movements afoot which are sponsored, at least in part, by men and women of the world. I just mention the attempt to stamp out, or at least curb, traffic in liquor; the cry which is going up against war; the League of Nations and the World Court; the noble work of the Red Cross and numerous social welfare organizations.

It is, of course, a simple matter to find fault with

these movements. Lots of faults cleave to them. Yet our Reformed doctrine of common grace enables us to see much good in them also, consequently to co-operate, and, when possible, even to seek to guide in the right direction.

(6) Well may Calvinism boast of its catholicity. Anybody who is at all acquainted with its history knows how perfectly ridiculous is the supposition, which some of our Holland people seem to harbor: that it takes a Dutchman to be a good Calvinist. Calvin himself did not have the good fortune of being Dutch. He was French by birth. Reformed theology originated in Switzerland. From there it spread in the Reformation period to France, and along the Rhine through Germany to Holland, eastward to Bohemia and Hungary, and westward, across the channel, to Great Britain. At the same time Lutheranism was largely confined to Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

Internationalism is now in the air. In saying this, I am not forgetting that there is in some lands a revival of nationalism. Just think of Italy. Yet the scanning of contemporaneous literature leads me to believe that before long the spirit of internationalism will be decidedly in the ascendancy. World Sunday school and missionary conventions, and such gatherings as the well nigh ecumenical council of Christian churches held at Stockholm in 1925, stir this spirit inestimably.

Dr. Hepp of the Free University of Amsterdam,

on his recent visit to America, lectured in several places on *International Calvinism*. After his return to Holland he published this lecture in amplified form in *De Reformatie*. How timely a subject! Surely, now is the time to promulgate on an international scale the principles of catholic Calvinism.

(7) Calvinism is essentially progressive. Sad to say, many who pose as adherents of this system are hide-bound reactionaries. They fail to understand Calvinism. They speak of what they know not. Calvinism is progressive.

Was not Calvin much more radical in his departures from Roman Catholicism than Luther? It is a fact, altogether too little remembered, that our Reformed fathers, in adopting the Confessions, intended that they should be revised from time to time in accordance with the additional light which the church would receive on the truths of Scripture. Reformed theology speaks of the progressive guidance of the church in the truth by the Holy Spirit. Dr. Kuyper used to say: "*Ecclesia reformata est reformanda*", which means in effect that a church, in order to merit the name *Reformed*, must keep on reforming. In the April 2, 1926, issue of *De Reformatie*, Dr. Hepp presented to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands a seven-point program of progress. It suggests an improved translation of the Bible, an extension of the Confession, a pleading for healthy mysticism, a revision of the church's liturgy, the addition of some hymns to the Psalter, the reorgan-

ization of city churches, and the adoption of a definite policy with reference to so-called modern culture.

Progressiveness may almost be called the watchword of our times. Humanity is boasting of the progress already achieved and is pressing on to more. Here again there is abundant cause for criticism. There is much of false progressivism. Instead of building on firm foundations already laid, many are trying to demolish these foundations in the name of progressiveness. In unpardonable superficiality some reject the old simply because it is old and prefer the new for no other reason than that it is new. But after all has been said, the fact remains that men everywhere are insisting on progress. They want a progressive religion too. And they are entitled to one that is truly progressive. Shall we then not be up and doing to present the claims of our progressive Calvinism?

Extreme progressivism is usually called radicalism. There is much of it today, so much that many are becoming alarmed. And there is reason for alarm, for it would pluck up things by the roots. Shall we oppose it with the conservatism of stand-patters? That would be poor policy indeed. It would only provoke the radical to radicalism more dangerous still. The thing for us to do is to substitute for the morbid radicalism of the day a healthy radicalism: for the radicalism that tears up things by the roots, radicalism that goes to the root of things. Such is the radicalism of Calvinism.

I have attempted to point out suggestively that several of the essential features of Calvinism are in demand today. If that contention is true, then now is the time for their propagation.

A few words may be added with special reference to America. In our land Calvinism is not at all popular. The outlook for Calvinism in the United States is in many ways dark. But I am convinced that this is largely the fault of Calvinists. Folk round about us misunderstand Calvinism because we do not tell them plainly what it stands for. And what high regard for Calvinism might we not instill into their minds if we should take pains to point out to them that this great nation owes many of its institutions, much of its glory, and in large measure its very founding to Calvinism! In *What Calvinism Has Done for America*, J. C. Monsma made a laudable attempt in this direction. We need to do much more along this line.

Do I think that we can make Calvinists by propaganda? Of course not. No more than the preacher of Christianity can make Christians of his hearers, can we by teaching Calvinism turn men into Calvinists. Calvinism, like Christianity, is an attitude of heart. Only he is a true Calvinist whose heart trusts in God and loves God. And it takes God the Holy Spirit to make men at heart what they ought to be. The Holy Spirit makes Calvinists.

But, surely, it does not follow that we may be idle. God is wont to employ means. Very often God is

pleased to work through the instrumentality of men. God frequently honors men by appointing them his colaborers. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" That Paul said about the preaching of the Christ. It is applicable also to the promulgation of Calvinism. And if we diligently and prayerfully plant and water, may we not confidently expect God to give the increase?

A Vision

CHAPTER XVII.

A VISION

AND it shall come to pass that the truly Reformed Christians of this continent, scattered throughout various denominations, will be gathered together into one body: *The American Reformed Church.*

Amid the sneers of men of little faith, sons of Abraham, father of believers, and brethren of Paul, apostle of faith, will gird themselves for its establishment, enthused by the motto: "Nil desperandum Deo duce."

And upon the realization of the noble project, the members of this church will kneel in humble adoration and exclaim: "What hath God wrought!"

Modern means of conveyance and conversation will wonderfully facilitate the intercourse of the individual churches, spread though they be over the whole continent.

While at first its growth will be slow because of that traditionalism which is common to all men, eventually its branches will reach every corner of this vast land, and the children of God of Reformed persuasion everywhere will sit in its shade.

The Confessions of this church will embody all the salient truths of the Reformed Standards of former

centuries, with additions as the Holy Spirit may direct and the exigencies of the age require.

The principle underlying its government in every manifestation will be the Kingship of Jesus Christ.

The tolerance of Christ will be practised in this church: the constituent bodies will not trouble one another because of differences due to sectional traits or traditions.

Christian love among its members in such peace and joy will distill that the souls of other Christians will be filled with a holy jealousy, and even the world will be constrained to testify that it must be a good Master who has such disciples.

This church will diligently heed the word of the Lord by the mouth of the evangelical prophet: "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left: and thy seed shall inherit the gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

The promise will be gloriously fulfilled: "Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires, and I will make thy windows of agates and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones; and all thy children shall be taught of Jehovah, and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Methinks I hear a strain of heavenly music, voices of angels, falling on my ear: "Glory to God in the

highest, and among men peace and salvation, for the breech of his people is being healed.”

Upon its banner these words will be emblazoned in letters of gold: “Of him, and through him, and unto him are all things; unto whom be glory forever. Amen!”

Thus will be hastened the day when, all things having been subdued unto the Son, “he himself will also be subject unto him that put all things under him, THAT GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL.”



